

# **Women's desistance from crime: a gender-responsive, trauma-informed analysis**

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## Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

# Abstract

## **Women's desistance from crime: a gender-responsive, trauma-informed analysis.**

The central theme of this thesis is the analysis of women's efforts to desist from crime after prison. The research was carried out with a cohort of women in HMP Holloway between 2013-2015, the period immediately preceding the prison's closure in June 2016. Based on three waves of in-depth interviews with the women, the research explores the factors women experience as supportive of, or obstacles to, desistance. Gendered justice frameworks and trauma-informed approaches are increasingly informing correctional practice with women. These perspectives are employed in the analysis to give particular consideration to the relevance of women's experiences of victimisation and trauma to their efforts to terminate offending and related behaviours. Literature on desistance generally is juxtaposed with that focused specifically on women's desistance. This highlights the neglect of gender in theorising on the processes associated with leaving crime behind. A feminist constructivist grounded theory approach to the research design, the fieldwork, and the data analysis aims to address this by providing a gendered perspective on desistance processes related to building relationships, restoring a sense of self, and the exercise of agency and appropriate responsibility. The main arguments of this thesis, based on the rich testimonies of the participants, centre on the impact of gendered experiences of adversity on these processes. The women's insights into how best help them recover from experiences that contribute to their offending are analysed, culminating in a proposed framework for practice to support women's desistance that integrates desistance, trauma-informed and gender-responsive approaches to practice.

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"I think even when you feel the lowest you can feel in life, there is always a little spark there inside all of us, it's just what brings it out..." (Janelle)



*The Bat Cave, HMP Holloway.* Image courtesy of Koestler Arts.

## Dissemination

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25 November 2015: 'Lynne:' 'I've the body of a woman but inside I feel like a child.'

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/ive-body-woman-inside-i-feel-child>

7 December 2015: 'Rosie:' 'You get plenty of punishment.'

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/you-get-plenty-punishment>

15 December 2015: 'Alice:' 'I wish that I could be like normal people.'

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/i-wish-i-could-be-normal-people>

10 February 2016: 'Misha:' 'They don't care.'

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/misha-they-dont-care>

13 April 2016: 'Tasha:' 'I want to move on from this.'

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/tasha-i-want-move>

8 July 2016: 'Ellie:' 'My daughter was my purpose.'

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/resources/ellie-my-daughter-was-my-purpose>

# Glossary

ACEs	Adverse childhood experiences
ACSL	Average custodial sentence length
AP	Approved premises
BAME	Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic
BPD	Borderline Personality Disorder
BSC	British Society of Criminology
BTI	Becoming Trauma Informed
CBT	Cognitive behavioural therapy
CGT	Constructivist grounded theory
CRC	Community Rehabilitation Companies
DBT	Dialectal behavioural therapy
DSM-V	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (5 <sup>th</sup> edition)
EMDT	Eye movement desensitisation therapy
ET	Exposure therapy
FU1	Follow up 1 (interview from first wave of follow-up sessions)
FU2	Follow up 2 (interview from second wave of follow-up sessions)
GRT	Gender responsive treatment
GLM	Good Lives model
HMIP	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons & Probation
HMPPS	Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
ICD-10	International Classification of Diseases (10 <sup>th</sup> edition)
MBT	Mentalisation based therapy
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NPS	National Probation Service
PTSD	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
REC	Research Ethics Committee
RNR	Risk Need Responsivity model
SEEDS	Skills for effective engagement, development, and supervision

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# 1. Introduction

I never thought about myself in terms of me being a woman. I really haven't. You know, what is a woman? Who am I? I'm still working it out (Lynne, initial interview).<sup>1</sup>

Lynne was serving a twenty-seven month sentence in HMP Holloway in 2014. At fifty-two years old, she was a regular at 'Hotel Holloway'.<sup>2</sup> Lynne had stabbed her partner during an alcohol-fuelled argument, though her account of what happened relied on what others had told her. She had no memory of the incident. Violence and abuse featured heavily in Lynne's life story. Her first abuser was her father who sexually exploited her, prostituting her out to a family friend. He was also physically abusive towards Lynne, her mother, and her siblings. By the time she was eleven years old Lynne had been diagnosed with depression and prescribed medication, though she was also self-medicating with alcohol having discovered it helped her to cope with what was happening to her. However, it also left her vulnerable to those who would seek to exploit her. At seventeen she met her partner who was physically, emotionally, and sexually abusive. She stayed with him for twenty-four years, only leaving him when she discovered he had sexually abused their daughter. Other similarly abusive relationships followed. The pattern of drinking and violence punctuated only by short periods of imprisonment and psychiatric hospital admissions as she literally battled to survive.

Lynne appeared to be at a turning point when we met. Her comments above reflect her growing consciousness that the largely gendered adversities she had experienced over her lifetime had ravaged her sense of self. Confused and shocked by the behaviour that resulted in the sentence, wracked with guilt about her children and grandchildren, shamed by her continued reliance on alcohol, stigmatised by her experiences and behaviour, frightened by the harm she had caused and conscious that it was no life to be leading 'at her time of life', she was determined this sentence would be her last.

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<sup>1</sup> All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. The phase of interviewing from which quotations are taken are denoted as 'initial interview,' 'FU1' (follow-up 1, and 'FU2' (follow-up 2). Where women were only interviewed once, only the pseudonym is used.

<sup>2</sup> This misnomer was used ironically by several of the participants when talking about HMP Holloway.

Four years later, at the time of writing, Lynne has not returned to prison. This cessation in offending, however, is not symbolic of a dramatic shift in her life circumstances. She left prison and reunited with the partner who was the victim of her offence, a partner who had been abusive to her and who also has a severe drinking problem. Her relationships with her children and grandchildren remain fraught; improving, but still a trigger to feelings of stress, anxiety, shame, and guilt. Lynne suffers poor physical health, which limits her mobility and causes significant pain. This interrupts her ability to attend appointments for mental health treatment. Her depression and anxiety continue to constrict her life. In the two years we had contact after her release, Lynne mostly remained abstinent from alcohol, but did have four or five significant lapses. Lynne is desisting from crime, but contrary to common understandings of desistance, this has not been accompanied by any wholesale reframing of her identity or changes to her life circumstances.

This thesis analyses women's experiences of their efforts to desist from crime following release from custody. The study uses a qualitative, longitudinal design to uncover the women's understandings of the factors that support or present obstacles to desistance post-imprisonment. Understanding and supporting women's desistance is hindered on two fronts. Firstly, the omission of gender from the desistance literature. Women were either not included in studies or there has been limited meaningful gendered analyses of the key findings and resulting theories (see, for example, Rodermond, Kruttschnitt, Slottbloom and Bijleveld, 2016; Uggen and Kruttschnitt, 1998). Secondly, policy and practice responses to offending have historically relied on co-opting programmes and interventions based on evidence of efficacy with men (Covington and Bloom, 1999; Kendall, 2013; Trotter, 2013; van Wormer, 2010). The omission of women's experiences, like those of Lynne, from much of the desistance research has resulted in uncertainty about how to best support women's desistance, much of the commentary assuming that desistance-based practice approaches are 'gender-neutral' and equally effective for all genders (Carlton and Baldry, 2013; Evans, 2018; Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts, 2007). This study aims to address some of these knowledge gaps by exploring women's efforts to leave crime behind after prison. Based on their understanding of the perceived obstacles to or facilitators of desistance, it examines how trauma-informed approaches might provide both a gendered perspective on women's

desistance journeys and a framework for supporting women in their efforts to terminate offending behaviour.

## 1.2. Definitions and processes of desistance

To provide context to this examination of women's experiences of desistance, it is important to briefly explain how desistance and its related processes are commonly defined. Criminal careers research evidences that most people grow out of crime. During the course of their seminal study, *Unraveling Juvenile Delinquency*, Gleuck and Gleuck (1950) discovered that as the boys in their sample aged, the frequency and seriousness of their offending declined, so that by the age of twenty-five most had stopped offending. Subsequent studies of the 'age-crime curve' reveal offending to peak in the late teenage or early adult years, decreasing sharply by age thirty (for example, Blumstein and Cohen, 1987). Thus, desistance might be understood as an *event*, that being the termination of offending behaviour (Laub and Sampson, 2001). However, even a lengthy crime-free period cannot guarantee someone has desisted permanently (Maruna, 2001). Drawing on Matza's (1964) observation that offenders 'drift' in and out of crime and Glaser's (1964) definition of a 'zigzag path' between offending and not, Maruna (2001) makes the point that criminal behaviour is sporadic. For this reason, he suggests desistance might be more usefully defined not as a change event, but as a '*process of maintaining non-criminal behaviour*' (Maruna, 2001: 26). From this perspective, definitions of desistance might also include reductions in the frequency and/or seriousness of the offending behaviour as part of a process of *desisting* rather than having desisted (Gadd and Farrall, 2004; Laub and Sampson, 2001). Despite variance in how individual studies have defined desistance, the different perspectives are not necessarily contradictory. Taken together they recognise desistance as a dual process of change *and* maintenance as the individual moves towards the cessation of offending and the development of a law-abiding lifestyle.

Desistance theories articulate how we might understand the processes involved in terminating offending behaviours. Bersani and Doherty (2013) frame desistance theories as a continuum. At one end are theories that focus on situational change. These ideas centralise the impact of ageing, changes to routine activities, the acquisition of social capital, and the

'knifing off' of criminal associations to desistance. At the other end are subjective theories that focus on identity transformation and cognitive development. In between lie psychosocial theories that have explored how socio-structural and subjective shifts interact to produce desistance from crime (Farrall, Hunter, Sharpe and Calverley, 2011, 2014; LeBel, Burnett, Maruna and Bushway, 2008). Whilst some theories prioritise either social or subjective factors as the primary force for change, it is now largely acknowledged that the desistance happens as a result of some level of interplay between the two (Farrall and Bowling, 1999; LeBel et al., 2008). Subjective changes may precede life changing events and opportunities or vice versa (LeBel et al., 2008; Bersani and Doherty, 2013).

*Primary desistance*, periods of crime-free behaviour, has been distinguished from *secondary desistance*, periods of crime-free behaviour which are supported by a shift in personal identity (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell and Naples, 2006: 274). More recently, McNeill (2014) has introduced the further distinction of *tertiary desistance* to refer to the acceptance of change by others, resulting in the achievement of belonging within a moral community and access to its resources. The language of primary, secondary, and tertiary desistance suggests a sequential process of change. However, Nugent and Schinkel (2016) question this linear interpretation of the desistance process, arguing that we might better conceptualise it as three interacting and mutually reinforcing domains of *act*, *identity*, and *relational* desistance (p.570).

In sum, desistance has been conceptualised as a process of instigating and sustaining change that involves sequential or interacting processes of behaviour modification, shifts in self-perception, and adjustments in personal and social relations.

## 1.3. Identification of the research problem

### 1.3.1 Applying trauma theory to women's experiences of desistance

The traumatic life experiences that are laid bare in Lynne's life story are painfully common among women in the justice system (see for example, Belknap, 2007; Covington and Bloom, 2006; DeHart, 2008; Gelsthorpe and Wright, 2015; van Wormer, 2010). Trauma and abuse,

particularly when experienced in relationships, impacts on behaviour, self-concept, and connections with others, all of which have been shown to be significant to desistance. However, experiences of trauma and abuse have received little attention from desistance scholarship.

To better understand potential associations between women's experiences of trauma and abuse and desistance, I researched work on trauma recovery. The emphasis in the trauma literature on acknowledging and developing skills to cope with experiences of abuse and victimisation as part of processes of change and self-actualisation led me to conclude this body of work has particular significance to understanding and supporting women's desistance. The discourse of trauma has been appearing with increasing frequency in recent policy in relation to the treatment of women in the justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). The testimonies of women in this research imply that the centrality of violence and trauma to other major problems in their lives, including drug dependency, homelessness, and mental illness that are pathways to involvement with the justice system, are also significant in their efforts to desist. Underpinned by feminist epistemology, this research examines how trauma perspectives can inform understandings of women's desistance.

### 1.3.2. Using trauma-informed approaches to support women's desistance

The focus on desistance has represented a shift away from risk-focused paradigms that have been directing treatment provision for those in custody and subject to community sentences since the dawn of the 'what works'/ effective practice era in the late 1990s (Farrall, 2002; McNeill, 2006). The language of desistance, its focus on strengths, collaboration, the therapeutic relationship, and practical support offers a more positive approach to addressing recidivism (Fox and Marsh, 2016; McNeill, 2006; Weaver, 2011). It has been welcomed by practitioners as a contrast to the focus on deficits and risk factors that had characterised the operationalisation of the 'risk-need-responsivity' (RNR) approach (Maruna, Immarigeon and LeBel, 2004). As Farrall et al. (2014: 3) comment; *'There is now a substantial evidence base regarding the termination of criminal careers. Moreover this evidence is making inroads into the field of corrections and probation as practitioners and policy makers have begun to draw on the insights of academic research in developing desistance-focused practice.'* Elsewhere,



however, Weaver (2016) argues that understanding how a paradigm shift from risk-focused to desistance-based approaches might be realised in practice remains little understood. This is particularly true of the nascent understandings of women's desistance. Insight into how desistance is experienced differently by minority groups in the criminal justice system, including women, remains in its infancy, impeding desistance-informed practice that also accounts for issues related to identity, diversity, and marginalisation (Robinson and Hamilton, 2016). This thesis examines how the trauma-informed principles and approaches could offer a way of responding to factors women identify as important to their efforts to desist from crime, therefore constituting a gender-responsive approach to women's desistance.

### 1.3.3 Gender responsiveness, trauma, and desistance

Gender-responsive approaches differ from traditional desistance based approaches in that women's experiences are the starting point for their development (Evans, 2018). Stephanie Covington has been influential recently in developing trauma-informed practice guidance and interventions for correctional services (Covington, 2012, 2016). Covington's work with the organisation One Small Thing<sup>3</sup> has supported the implementation of trauma-informed practice in women's prisons in England, based on her original work with Barbara Bloom on gender specific programming for women (Bloom and Covington, 1998). Covington and Bloom's (2007:12-14) principles of gender-responsive practice for correctional services are:

- acknowledge that gender matters in women's experiences of offending and the justice system
- create a women-only environment based on safety, respect, and dignity
- develop policies, practices, and programmes that are relational and that promote healthy connections to children, family members, significant others, and the community
- address substance misuse, trauma, and mental health issues through comprehensive, integrated, and culturally relevant services and supervision
- provide women with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic conditions;

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<sup>3</sup> One Small Thing is a charity that trains front line staff and those who are caught up in the justice system to understand trauma and its impact on both a systemic and an individual level. <https://onesmallthing.org.uk/>

- establish a system of comprehensive and collaborative community services.

Parallels can be made with Corston's (2007) emphasis on identifying distinct resettlement pathways for women, highlighting the need to address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women in the justice system. Similarly, in their report on community provision for women offenders, Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts (2007: 8) identified '*nine lessons*' for service providers that would ensure they acknowledge and respond to women's personal, social, economic, and relational needs, and develop holistic approaches to practice.

In common with desistance, gender-responsive and trauma-informed principles for practice have a relational focus. The attention to holistic, practical support, and community integration is clear. Beyond this though, the acknowledgement of the role of gender, the broad interpretation of relational development, the attention to substance use and mental health problems as co-occurring symptoms of trauma, the whole system approach, and attention to women's pathways to crime outlined in principles of gender responsiveness and trauma recovery may provide a framework for understanding and supporting women's desistance.

## 1.4 The feminist orientation of the study

Poststructural and postmodernist feminist perspectives that critique gendered justice frameworks argue at least for the diversion of women out of the justice system, and often for the abolition of imprisonment altogether. These perspectives engage specifically in gendered critiques of the structures and processes of criminalisation, imprisonment, and post-release supervision, tying broader socio-political events to the increasing rates of women's imprisonment and the criminalisation of marginalised and disadvantaged women (Segrave and Carlton, 2013). This scholarship challenges work that advocates for gender-responsive approaches that do not address the gendered harms caused by the justice system itself, and engages in the important work of envisaging alternative ways to respond to the factors that contribute to women's offending beyond the confines of existing structures and processes. Theoretically, my own feminism is aligned with these goals. However, the experiences of the women in this study convinced me of the urgency of implementing approaches within the

current system that offer a means of addressing the gendered harms suffered by criminalised women in the here and now. The women's reflections on their experiences of prison also revealed the importance of understanding and developing the opportunities the system provides for women to address some of the factors in their criminalisation (see chapter nine). The feminist principles that guided this research are detailed in chapter four. They amount to a feminist stance that is rooted in standpoint feminism (Renzetti, 2013). The study, its findings, and proposals for practice are primarily constituted by the experiences of the women, but are situated within the parameters of the prevailing structures and processes of the justice system. They do not call for the dismantling of this system. They do, however, demand a radical re-thinking of how the justice system understands offending by women and their gendered experiences within it.

## 1.5. Aims and objectives of the research

The aims and objectives of this research are as follows:

- To investigate the process of desistance for women, examining in detail women's experiences of, perspectives on, and insights into attempting to desist from crime following release from prison.
- To use a trauma-informed framework to analyse women's experiences of desistance.
- To link trauma-informed approaches, gender-responsivity, and desistance to explore how agencies in the justice system can support women's desistance from crime.
- Apply feminist perspectives to centralise the voices and stories of women as they attempt to leave crime behind. This study recognises the absence of these voices in the existing desistance literature and aims to provide new and original material that will enhance understandings of women's desistance.

## 1.6. Research questions

When entering the research field in August 2013, my overarching research question was:

- What factors do women leaving prison experience as either supporting or presenting obstacles to their efforts to desist from crime?

Related to this was a hypothesis that women's experiences of desistance would have sexed and gendered elements to them. Therefore, a secondary question for the research was:

- To what extent are women's experiences of the desistance process gendered?

These questions will be explored within the existing literature to identify existing knowledge before being considered in relation to the testimonies of the participants in this study.

Feminist approaches to research stress the importance of research activism. Feminist research should have some real-world social policy or practice impact that empowers women or otherwise improves the area of women's lives being researched (Hesse-Biber, 2014). In order for this research to adhere to this principle, I considered an additional sub-question:

- How can prisons and other agencies in the justice system best support women's efforts to desist from crime?

These questions are rooted within the foundations of the methodological approach and steer my analysis and discussion.

## 1.7. The structure of the thesis.

Four core themes were identified from this research as significant to women's journeys towards desistance. They provide the overall structure for this thesis. I have defined these themes as: 'relationships,' 'responsibility,' 'restoration,' and 'recovery.'

Following on from this introduction, chapters two and three examine the two theoretical frameworks underpinning this research, namely desistance and trauma theories. Chapter two begins with an analysis of desistance research from a feminist perspective, examining traditional desistance theories against those studies focused specifically on women and

desistance. The review of this literature is structured around the four themes of relationships, responsibility, restoration, and recovery. Chapter three introduces and analyses trauma theory and its value as a perspective from which to examine women's desistance. It also considers the points of congruence and divergence within the literatures on desistance and trauma-informed approaches as they relate to the four themes developed in this research.

Chapter four provides a reflexive analysis of the research epistemology, ontology, and methodologies. This study is longitudinal, qualitative research (LQR) underpinned by feminist epistemology and uses constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methods of data collection and analysis.

Chapter five introduces the women who participated in this research study. It provides data on aspects of their personal, social, and offending histories that are relevant to this study and analyses the extent to which these are correlated with trajectories towards successful desistance.

Chapters six, seven, eight, and nine examine the findings of the thematic analyses of the interviews. Each chapter uses the women's narratives to explore the significance of each theme in women's efforts to leave crime behind.

Chapter six analyses the women's experiences of relationships, both intimate and familial, and their significance to their processes of desistance. Relationships are central to desistance and to women's emotional development (Gilligan, 1993, Covington, 1998), however the desistance literature's depiction of relationships is based on a male norm. This chapter explores pre- and post-prison relationships, challenging ungendered assumptions about the role they play in the desistance process. It explores how trauma-informed approaches offer a model for healthy relationship development based on mutuality for women in the justice system.

Chapter seven investigates the women's processes of restoration. This chapter examines how the women seek to restore their identities and the experience of actualising these redefined selves post-imprisonment. It examines the processes involved in creating conventional selves

from shamed, stigmatised, and criminalised identities. It considers the availability of, and access to, forms of social capital that can facilitate the casting off of 'offender' identities. These experiences are explored in relation to the process of identity (re)formation and community engagement embedded within principles of trauma-informed practice.

The focus of chapter eight is on responsibility. The notion that the individual is responsible for the path they take from the prison gate was a dominant theme from the research. This chapter critically analyses the women's understanding of the role of agency to their desistance. It examines the women's experiences of attempting to exercise autonomy in their lives, drawing on feminist interpretations of responsibility and autonomy. This chapter explores how resilience has manifested throughout the women's lives and how it interacts with conceptualisations of agency in their efforts to desist. It considers how principles from trauma recovery can support the development of appropriate responsibility with women the justice system.

Within the theme of recovery, chapter nine applies a trauma recovery model to analyse the women's insights into the types of support that they perceive or have experienced as helpful to them leaving crime behind after prison. It sets out proposals for practice based on integrating trauma-informed, gender-responsive approaches.

The concluding chapter summarises the key findings from the research as they relate to the research questions. It draws together the findings and proposes a framework for responding to the women's identified recovery needs in a way that incorporates learning from desistance and recovery models with attention to gender and trauma. It considers the implications of this research for desistance theory, and makes recommendations for future research to develop gender-responsive, trauma-informed approaches to supporting women's desistance.

## 1.8. Original contribution to scholarship

This thesis contributes to the scholarship on desistance in the following ways. Firstly, it is one of a limited number of longitudinal studies of women's desistance with a cohort of women

leaving prison in the UK. Secondly, the methodological approach takes an explicitly feminist perspective in order to centralise the voices of the women, and uncover and interrogate gendered elements of the desistance process. Thirdly, it uses perspectives from trauma theory and principles of trauma-informed practice to produce a trauma-informed understanding of women's desistance. Finally, the proposed framework for practice is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to integrate knowledge from desistance, gender-responsive, and trauma-informed approaches into a structured, sequenced model for practice with women in the justice system.

There is significance in the fact that the voices in this research are those of the last residents of HMP Holloway. In addition to the primary aims and objectives of this project, and its contributions to desistance scholarship, it is hoped that it will stand as testimony to the life experiences, values, attitudes, beliefs, and strengths of those confined within this iconic structure at a key point in *its* story.

## 2. Literature review part 1:

### Feminist perspectives on desistance

This and the subsequent chapter introduce the core theories of desistance from crime and trauma recovery to provide the theoretical framework for this research.

When working to support desistance with a population of women in the justice system, understanding their gendered experiences is crucial, a point feminist criminologists, such as Mary Eaton, have been asserting for decades; *'The control of women is mediated by gender. It is as women that they occupy a social space both within and beyond the prison. It is as women that they are subject to control and it is as women they must find self-direction'* (Eaton, 1993: 17). As with other areas of criminology, the aim of developing gendered perspectives on

desistance is not to essentialise women's experiences, but to re-examine desistance theories so that they *include* women and the ways in which gender matters to desistance.

This chapter begins with an analysis of the extent to which women have been included in the desistance research and resulting theories. Following this, the analysis casts a feminist lens on the desistance literature, with an emphasis on the themes most pertinent to the findings of this study. To achieve this, this review considers empirical work on women's desistance. Whether this work can be defined as providing feminist perspectives on desistance is questionable as it is of note that most scholars of women's desistance make no explicit statement about feminism (an exception being Österman, 2018). Their work draws on pioneering feminist criminological theory, such as pathways theory (Daly, 1994), to contextualise their work. The work also often describes approaches to research that are in-keeping with feminist approaches, including all-women samples, qualitative methods, in-depth interviews, attention to researcher positionality, and a concern to centralise the voices of women (see chapter four). However, the published studies rarely make reference to feminist epistemology and methodology or an intentional feminist perspective on desistance, and without this, a feminist orientation cannot be assumed. Casting a feminist lens on the literature therefore refers to the explicit feminist orientation of this review, which seeks to compare traditional desistance studies with those carried out with women's experiences in order to interrogate the conceptualisation of experiences and processes important to women's desistance.

Starting with the role of relationships in desistance, the chapter explores how relationships have been theorised to contribute to desistance generally, then interrogates these ideas from a feminist perspective, using research that has focused specifically on women's desistance. The same process is used to examine the themes of restoration, responsibility, and recovery, juxtaposing the general desistance scholarship with research specifically with women, in order to examine the extent to which the extant work on desistance incorporates women's experiences. The chapter concludes that whilst some of the factors that are important to the desistance process are similar for all genders, there are variations in the prevalence, nature, and access to opportunities that support desistance that warrant further investigation and demand a gendered framework for analysis.



## 2.1. Desistance and the problem of invisible women

Desistance theories take account of how the social positionality of an individual and opportunities to which they are exposed interact with agentic factors to bring about the termination of offending and offending-related behaviours (see for example, Farrall et al., 2014; LeBel et al., 2008; Maruna, 2001). It has been argued that they fail to avoid the androcentricity to which most criminological theories are prone, in that they are '*male centric, individualistic and ignore[s] the interlocking structural contexts of race, class and gender*' (Carlton and Baldry, 2013: 65; see also, Österman, 2018; Rodermond et al., 2016; Uggen and Kruttschmidt, 1998). The reason for this omission is usually cited as a problem of scale; there are too few women and they are not delinquent enough (Carlen, 2002). Women and girls were not present in the research samples in sufficiently large numbers for comprehensive analysis of their experiences and they commit less crime, less frequently, so do not have comparable criminal careers from which to desist (Giordano, Cernkovich and Rudolph, 2002).

Understanding the factors that are common to the desistance experience facilitates neat categorisations that are central to understanding how to support desistance in practice. However, this focus conceals important individual experiences that can be influenced by personal and social context (Robinson and Hamilton, 2016). Hiding behind gender-neutral analyses of the interplay between socio-structural factors and cognitive, individual factors in the desistance process, is a *male* ex-offender, and it is his experiences and his understanding of offending and the desistance process that have shaped the discourse.

Pathways to crime research highlights gendered adversity including trauma, childhood abuse, intimate partner abuse, relational stress, and socio-economic disadvantage as significant in women's pathways to crime (Daly, 1994; Belknap, 2007; DeHart, 2008; Gelsthorpe and Wright, 2015; Salisbury and van Voorhis, 2009; Wattanaporn and Holfreter, 2014). It has been reasoned that if gender can influence routes into crime, there is cause to examine its influence on routes out (Heidemann, Cederbaum and Martinez, 2015). By absorbing women's experiences, and that of other minority groups, into that of the (white, male) majority, it is argued that the scholarship on desistance subjugates the specificities of

their experiences. Consequently, the applicability of desistance theories to women remains uncertain (Leverentz, 2014; McIvor, Trotter and Sheehan, 2009; Roderman et al., 2016, Rumgay, 2004b). The research that has considered women's desistance has revealed both similarities and differences in the nature of desistance for men and women (Matthews, Easton, Young and Blindel, 2014; McIvor et al., 2009; Roderman et al., 2016).

The chapter will now review themes from the desistance literature that are of most relevance to the themes that emerged from this research.

## 2.2. The role of relationships

Desistance theories have identified four ways in which relationships are significant to desistance (Bersani and Eggleston, 2013). Firstly, establishing relationships can act as a 'turning point' (Laub and Sampson, 1993, 2001; Horney, Osgood and Marshall, 1995). These ideas are built on the foundations of 'routine activities' theories (Cohen and Felson, 1979). They predict that as individuals transition to adulthood, offending will decrease as their roles and relationships change their daily activities to reduce opportunities for offending. Secondly, intimate and parental relationships function as informal social controls by linking members of society to one another, thereby creating socially integrated forms of control, surveillance, and sanction (Laub and Sampson, 1993). Thirdly, the change in roles and environments triggered by investment in relationships facilitates individuals' ties to societal institutions and the accumulation of social capital in their family lives. These ties embed the individual in a structured and reciprocal context of age-related roles, expectations, demands and opportunities, and support and reinforce identity transformation (Laub and Sampson, 1993; King, 2012). Fourthly, relationships create emotional bonds of attachment and interdependency. Desistance studies have emphasised that it is not the mere existence of relationships that contribute to desistance, but the quality and strength of those bonds (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Rutter, 1996 cited in Maruna, 2001). People change in order to sustain relationships they value (Weaver and McNeill, 2015) and, in turn, investment in these bonds accumulates and strengthens a commitment to desistance (Horney et al., 1995). Desistance therefore safeguards both strong emotional attachments to individuals and the integrity of

the 'future self' that is partly defined by the roles inherent in these relationships (Hunter and Farrall, 2018). Ultimately, the investments desisters make in relationships deter offending, as this becomes incompatible with these bonds (Farrall, 2005; Weaver and McNeill, 2015).

Theories of how relationships support desistance present perhaps the most significant challenge to scholars seeking to understand women's desistance and highlight the problems in assuming desistance theories are gender-neutral and therefore, generalisable to women. It is well-documented that relationships loom large in women's pathways to crime (for example, Barlow, 2016; Blanchette and Brown, 2006; Covington, 2003; Corston, 2007; Daly, 1994; Gelsthorpe and Wright, 2015; Owen, 1993; van Wormer, 2010). Relational theories of crime posit that disconnection or unhealthy relationships lead women to crime (see for example, Blanchette and Brown, 2006; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2013; Covington, 1998; Daly, 1994). Familial emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in childhood are instrumental as risk factors in girls' law-breaking, creating patterns of isolation, running away, substance use, and risky sexual practices such as prostitution/sex work<sup>4</sup> that pre-empt offending behaviour (Daly, 1994; Belknap, 2007). The experiences of the women in this research add further support to pathways theories that associate women's crime with their efforts to survive or escape abuse in the home, leading to '*spiralling marginality*' (Owen, 1998: 41) that further distances them from any conventionalising relationships.

In contrast to men, intimate partner violence and abuse persists into adult relationships for many women in the justice system. Research indicates that between 50-80% of women in prison have experienced domestic abuse (Ministry of Justice, 2018; Prison Reform Trust,

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<sup>4</sup> The appropriate terminology for prostitution/sex work is an intensely debated topic in modern feminism. These terms have the propensity to carry the weight of deviance, victimisation, and shame or denote empowerment, independence, and agency. 'Sex work' has been adopted by collectives fighting for the recognition of sex work as employment, and all the rights and protections implied by this. Advocates of the term argue that sex work is a choice and can be used as a route to empowerment and independence. Conversely, the term lends the commodification of (primarily) women's bodies for the sexual gratification of (primarily) men a legitimacy that many feminists deride. Many women in prostitution do not recognise choice and empowerment as a part of their experience, depicting it rather as abuse and victimisation. As a feminist researcher, I am unwilling to define the experience of another based on my personal beliefs on this issue. I accept that the women involved are using definitions that are most meaningful to them. For that reason, when discussing prostitution/sex work generally, I will use both terms, despite the resulting cumbersome expression. Where the women's specific experiences are discussed I will use their language.

2017; Women in Prison, 2017). Increasing awareness of coercive control in abusive relationships is starting to inform understanding of women who offend for the benefit, or at the behest, of those with whom they are in relationships (Barlow, 2016). Taken together, these studies indicate that relationships are as likely to be a turning point for women taking up criminal behaviour as they are to its termination.

Furthermore, research on the social control aspects of intimate relationships to male desistance emphasise the importance of the prosocial orientation of partners. This is problematized by both Giordano et al. (2002) and Leverentz (2006, 2014) in particular in relation to women. Criminalised women often have no option but to live in economically deprived communities, riven with unemployment and crime (Huebner, DeJong and Cobbina, 2010; Leverentz, 2006). In such social contexts, and given gendered patterns of offending, most of the men with whom they can form relationships are criminally-involved. This impacts on women's ability to use intimate relationships to accumulate social capital (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2006, 2014) and suggests the desistance-supporting social control function of relationships is not present. Indeed, with reference to relationships as a turning point, women's desistance has been found to evolve from the *termination* of intimate relationships (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014; McIvor et al., 2009).

With regard to the value of relationships in developing emotional bonds, women's intimate relationships have often been marred by abuse, violence, and addiction and intimate partners are regularly implicated in their offending behaviour. Establishing sufficient trust in these relationships to form meaningful and safe attachments is difficult. Consequently, attachments to intimate partners are cited infrequently as central to the desistance process (Giordano et al, 2002; Leverentz, 2014).

Graham and Bowling (1996) found that desistance occurred more abruptly for women who had children, indicating motherhood to be a particularly powerful 'turning point' for women. Subsequent studies have not found support for this finding, despite the prominence of motherhood as a feature in women's desistance narratives (Giordano et al., 2002; Huebner et al., 2010; Leverentz, 2014). As scholars of women's desistance argue, most mothers are already mothers when they come into the justice system, therefore there is no automatic

association between becoming a mother and leaving crime behind. Additionally, women's caretaking responsibilities are often central to the post-prison challenges they face.

Motherhood, in the context of the lives of most women in the justice system, is as likely to bring with it stress, loss, and surveillance as it is positive changes to routine activities and access to pro-social networks (Cobbina, 2009; Eaton, 1993; Giordano et al., 2002; Heidemann et al., 2015; Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013). Reasons for this coalesce around the capacity for women in the justice system to meet, and be seen to meet, standards of femininity and child-rearing associated with 'good' motherhood (Eaton, 1993; McCorkel, 2013). Perceived as failed mothers, they are often excluded from the social networks tied to motherhood. Their relationships with children do not offer a clear route to conventionality or a means of reifying redefined non-offender identities (Giordano et al., 2002).

Relationships are a consistent feature in women's desistance narratives (Heidemann et al., 2015; Leverentz, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Mclvor et al., 2009; Rumgay, 2004; Stone, Morash, Goodson, Smith and Cobbina, 2016), though research on women's desistance has revealed gendered dimensions to associations between relationships and desistance. A consistent finding from these studies is that the type of relationships that are important to women's desistance are more varied than the intimate and parental bonds emphasised in the general desistance research, and include women's relationships with extended family members and their connections with friends and community networks (for example, Cobbina 2010; Heidemann et al., 2015; Leverentz, 2014; Matthews et al., 2014; Mclvor et al., 2009; Rumgay, 2004; Stone et al., 2016). When envisaging desistance, women place a high value on relationships with family, friends, partners and, most importantly, children. However, the nature of these relationships is complicated, meaning they offer no straightforward route to the social bonds, identity transformation, and attachments required for successful desistance.

## 2.3. Restoring the self

Maintaining desistance has been shown to require intentional self-change. This involves identifying and working towards the creation of an alternative, non-offender identity (Maruna 2001; Paternoster and Bushway, 2009), and it is to these ideas this review now turns.

Restoration in this study refers to the importance the women placed on gaining self-knowledge and constructing a pro-social identity.

A prominent strand of desistance theory focuses on the role of identity transformation in leaving crime behind. This strand has been strongly influenced by symbolic interactionism and labelling theory that suggest labelling criminality can cause it to become incorporated within the individual's identity, so promoting further criminality. Some desistance studies (for example, Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2002) have suggested that, for people involved in repeat offending, desistance not only involves changes in behaviour, but also the redefinition of personal and social identities (Maruna et al., 2004).

Theories of identity transformation depict it as an active, dynamic process where agency plays a central role in the pursuit of a desired self (King, 2012). The first stage of this transition is to envisage an appealing and conventional replacement self (Giordano et al., 2002). However, the source of the initial change in self-concept may also be an aversive one. Here, a non-offending identity is created to avoid a 'feared self' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009).

The sociological concept of 'knifing off' was adopted by desistance theorists to illustrate how identity transformation is facilitated by distancing oneself from criminogenic associates and environments, thereby avoiding pressure to conform to past offending identities (Maruna and Roy, 2007; Sampson and Laub, 2003). A core feature of the reformulated identities presented by desisters is that they are future-oriented (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001). However, in his concept of 'redemption scripts,' Maruna (2001) suggests that knifing off is not necessary to desistance, that reinvention can be achieved by integrating the negative past experiences and behaviours into the narratives of the new self. As Maruna explains, *'Rather than knifing off one's troubled past, this redemption script allows the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life'* (2001: 87). Vaughan's (2007) *'internal conversion'* theory also concludes that desistance comes about as a result of an emotional reappraisal of how one's actions fit with their values. The self is redefined because it is presented not as the construction of an entirely new identity, but a reconnection with a real or 'true' self who is conventional and law-abiding

(Maruna, 2001; Maruna and Roy, 2007), and through which desisters envisage and access new social roles (see also, Giordano et al., 2002; Graham and Bowling, 1996).

The process of identity redefinition also necessitates a process of *de*-labelling (Veysey, Christian and Martinez, 2009) where the changed identity is recognised and reflected back by others who have not been stigmatised by involvement with the justice system. The new identity and its associated behaviours are rewarded and reinforced by acceptance from others. This has the additional effect of creating identity congruence, overcoming the discomfort caused by dissonance between past behaviours and new presentations of the self and reaffirming congruence between how one sees oneself and how one is seen by others (Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Rumgay, 2004b; Vaughan, 2007).

Identity transformation has been found to be essential to successful desistance generally and studies on women's desistance conclude that it is also important to women. However, by applying a gendered lens to identity transformation and desistance, scholars of women's desistance have uncovered gendered elements to this process, pertaining to the nature, function, and availability of alternative identities.

Studies specifically on women's desistance note the prominence of identity narratives based on highly traditional, conventional values (Eaton, 1993; Giordano et al., 2002; Heidemann et al., 2015; Leverentz, 2014; Rumgay, 2004b). These aspirations of conventionality can be significant to women's desistance process. Heidemann et al. (2015) comment that articulating such aspirations could positively indicate a readiness to engage with a process of change. Leverentz (2014) also suggests that in articulating a desire for normalcy, the women are demonstrating a commitment to change, as it requires that they recognise what is enjoyable and desirable about new, conventional identities, and the difficulties of their former lives.

However, Giordano et al. (2002) argue that, unlike men, the highly conventional replacement identities that women adopt, or aspire to, are often repressive and do not provide the means of them achieving the autonomy necessary to successfully leave crime and its associated behaviours behind. In patriarchal systems, the interaction of narrative, identity, and agency is navigated through a spectrum of gendered social and political institutions and practices.

Therefore, male ex-offenders can locate themselves in universal narratives. They are able to reify their identities, experiences, and actions in normatively valued forms of symbolic representation (Skeggs, 2004; Somer, 1994). The narrative repertoires through which women ex-offenders can redefine themselves are more limited and start from a position of devalued 'other,' as Skeggs (2004: 24) argues, *'Even though femininity is symbolically ubiquitous, it is not symbolically dominant in the same way as particular versions of masculinity, rarely operating as symbolic capital.'* As will be illustrated in more detail in later chapters, the opportunities for women to rewrite their stories through social action is restricted by the limited availability of acceptable narratives through which women can positively assemble their selves and make sense of their experiences. Although women envisage themselves conforming to normative narratives, the challenge for many is that they have very limited experience of what normality actually is or how to access it (Leverentz, 2014).

## 2.4. The role of responsibility

In this study, the word responsibility is used to conceptualise the women's sense of agency, autonomy, and self-efficacy in the process of desistance. It was evoked by the women through assertions that their individual effort would ultimately determine whether they were able to successfully leave crime behind after prison.

Desistance research theorises agency as the perceived capacity of the individual to interact with, and exercise a level of control over, their interactions with the social world, acknowledging the reality of choice as socially situated and subjectively interpreted (Farrall and Bowling, 1999; King, 2012; LeBel et al., 2008). A sense of agency has been found to differentiate those who desist from crime from those who do not (King, 2012). A highly agentic world view has been shown to support feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment (Maruna, 2001), create an openness to external opportunities for change (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna 2001), and be associated with the use of effective coping mechanisms when faced with challenges (Healy, 2014; Hunter and Farrall, 2018; Vaughan, 2007). It has also been shown to support positive interpretations of achievements and prospects (Leibrich, 1993), and to generate feelings of autonomy and personal growth, even in highly constrained social



circumstances (Healy, 2014, Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Additionally, research has linked agency to the use of intentional avoidance behaviours to maintain desistance (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011).

Key empirical studies on women's desistance conclude that agency is also significant to women's successful desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013; McIvor et al., 2009; Stone et al., 2016). Women's accounts in these studies, as in this research, give emphasis to agency in the process of desistance, centralising qualities of personal strength, self-reliance, tenacity, and patience. Stone et al. (2016) identified increased agency as important to women's ability to imagine a different life for themselves. The capacity to envisage desistance and change can be significant to its realisation (Giordano et al., 2002). Personal agency and self-efficacy also emerged in the narratives of the desisters in McIvor and colleagues research (2009), in contrast to those who were involved in offending post-release. However, these studies do not simply accept the existence of agency as important to women's desistance as evidence that there is no gendered dimension to it. They scrutinise barriers to exercising agency from a gendered perspective.

Studies on women's desistance point to the social constraints women face in exercising agency. Giordano and colleagues (2002) identify a fundamental limitation with a phenomenological approach to studying desistance is that it fails to take account of the broader structures of power and opportunity that impact on the exercise of agency. They argue that it is important to pay attention to the '*boundried territories and specific nexus of opportunities and constraints*' (Giordano et al 2002: 1004) when theorising agency, recognising that for women, gender intersects with their positions as disadvantaged offenders, minorities, and a patriarchal socio-political context to define those boundaries and opportunities (see also, McCorkel, 2013; Leverentz, 2014). In short, the exercise of agency requires at least *some* choice and *some* power. Being a woman can compound social, economic, cultural, and political marginalisation, restricting choice and power and, thus, constraining the exercise of agency (Giordano et al., 2002).

Giordano et al. (2002) also draw attention to the intersections of gender, race, and class disadvantage faced by desisting women and the restrictions these can pose to the exercise

of agency. They argue that in circumstances of severe deprivation, a sense of agency is insufficient to bring about change (Giordano et al 2002: 1026). The women in Leverentz' (2014) research provide a useful example of these gendered constraints to agency. Leverentz explains that *'women in the drug economy often remain in subordinate or peripheral positions and often acquire access to roles through their relationships with men. Despite this, many women who are engaged in street life believe in their independence and efficacy within a street culture'* (Leverentz, 2014: 7). This indicates that gendered power relations influence women's understanding of agency. They can perceive themselves to have agency in situations of limited self-determination because of their connections to others. The potential consequences of these misconceptions have been revealed by recent data suggesting approximately half of women in prison for drug offences in England and Wales committed their offence for someone else (Prison Reform Trust, 2018).

The relationship between self-efficacy and desistance has been critiqued by those seeking to engender desistance theories. It has been argued that a focus on agency lends legitimacy to a neo-liberal responsabilisation agenda (Carlton and Segrave, 2011). This discourse is argued to be particularly pertinent to women as their routes to offending are rarely the result of their personal decision-making. McCorkel (2013) powerfully counters this responsabilization script stating *'...women are expected to take ownership of their problems and resolve them by learning how to make the right choices even when the situations they find themselves in are not an outcome of choice'* (McCorkel 2013:11). Similarly, in Leverentz' (2014) study, she identifies the rarity with which women mentioned structural barriers in their narratives around anticipated routes to change, despite these barriers being prevalent and tangible. Leverentz (2014) acknowledges that, in this respect, the women's narratives reflect the absorption of external messages about self-efficacy and the necessity of individual effort and determination. In this context, when the women fail, when a determination to change is thwarted by relapse, relationship problems, mental illness, lack of housing, victimisation, or any number of other possible obstacles, the failure is the women's alone.

## 2.5. Processes of recovery and desistance

For many women in this study, successful desistance was perceived to hinge on their ability to address substance use and mental health problems and find better ways of coping with the practical and emotional challenges of sustaining change. Relapses into drug, alcohol, and mental health problems were the obstacles most commonly cited that would result in a return to custody.

The desistance research has uncovered the factors deemed significant to desistance and articulated the processes by which desistance is achieved. The additional obligation of this scholarship to inform and enhance rehabilitative practice is identified by Weaver and McNeill (2015) who state, '*Underlying the desistance scholarship lies an aspiration and an expectation that better understandings of desistance can and should enable the development of better approaches to punishment, rehabilitation, and reintegration and thus the creation of safer and fairer societies*' (Weaver and McNeill, 2015: 95).

However, unlike approaches such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, desistance theories do not easily translate into models of practice (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; McNeill, 2012). There is debate as to whether the development of any standardised model of practice would, in fact, run counter to one of the core principles of desistance, that being that desistance is a personal journey that belongs to the individual. In light of this, operationalising desistance has been theorised as principles or interventions that can support, rather than instigate or force change (McNeill, 2006; McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

A key principle of desistance-based approaches to recovery and rehabilitation is that the service user and practitioner work collaboratively to support efforts to change (McNeill, 2006). This principle is articulated through McNeill's submission that practitioners work *with* service users, not *on* them (McNeill, 2006), defining tasks, needs, and obstacles to desistance collaboratively. Weaver (2011) expanded the scope of collaborative practice by applying principles of co-production to criminal justice practice. Co-production involves not only service users and professionals, but also family and community networks, in the design and delivery of services. According to this model, desistance work is relational beyond the

practitioner/service user alliance. Friends, family, and community networks can motivate and help sustain change and are therefore an important consideration in professional support (Weaver and McNeill, 2015). Whilst there are clear challenges to operationalising this approach (Weaver, 2011), the diversity of stakeholders in the change process offers the potential to realise personal, social, legal, and moral rehabilitation (McNeill, 2012). Intervention that supports desistance is defined as being strengths-based. RNR approaches work by identifying and working on the problems that led to offending. Strengths-based approaches, by contrast, support and develop the strengths that sustain desistance (Maruna and LeBel, 2003; McNeill, 2006). The role of the practitioner can be integral to this by supporting the individual to recognise strengths and develop motivation whilst demonstrating a belief and hope that they can succeed (Rex, 1999). Reflecting research from the field of psychotherapy, the relationship between the practitioner and the service user has been identified as being much more significant to successful desistance than any specific intervention (McNeill, 2004). Desisters have identified practitioners who express a belief in their ability to change (Rex, 1999), who give practical advice and listen (Farrall et al., 2014), who reinforce their normality (Farrall et al., 2014), and who work on developing both their human and social capital (Farrall, 2002) to have had the most impact.

Whilst studies of women's desistance have started to reveal some of the ways in which the desistance process is gendered, there has been less attention on how to support desistance in a gender-responsive way. Studies on women's desistance highlight how gender compounds many of the challenges faced by those leaving prison. There is increased prevalence of past trauma, ongoing victimisation, systemic disadvantage, primary caring responsibilities, and the co-existence of mental illness and drug dependency among women in the justice system (Stone et al., 2016). Therefore, supporting women's desistance means acknowledging, first and foremost, that gender matters (Carlton and Segrave, 2011; Cobbina and Bender, 2012; Leverentz, 2014; McIvor et al., 2009). Histories of trauma, living with ongoing domestic abuse, and co-existing mental illness and drug dependency mean women may rely more on professional services to help them sustain desistance, yet the availability of such provision is scarce (Bui and Morash, 2010; Gelsthorpe, 2009; Maidment, 2006; McCorkel, 2013). Core desistance processes such as redefining identity, exercising responsibility, and managing relationships can be mediated by gender, yet there is a lack of gender-informed

provision either in prisons or community correctional services (Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2013). Consequently, women often find themselves subject to intervention that fails to address the gendered nature of their experiences (Corston, 2007).

Some studies on women's desistance have undertaken empirical research with women engaged in women-only services after release from prison and have made policy proposals for gender-responsive service provision. There is consensus that the support provided needs to be holistic, recognising the inter-relatedness of drug dependency, mental illness, and offending behaviour (Leverentz, 2014; Barr, 2018). Matthews et al. (2014) propose a harm reduction approach to substance misuse and prostitution/sex work, with more structured support as and when requested by the women (Matthews et al., 2014). Leverentz (2014) suggests services need to confront the social inequalities that are sustained by criminal justice policy focused on individual pathology and that they should include public acknowledgement of progress towards desistance (Leverentz, 2014). Most of the studies highlight the importance of offering practical support with housing, education, employment and welfare concerns (Eaton, 1993).

In the UK, the Corston Report (2007) provided an impetus to develop high quality, gender-informed community services for criminal justice involved women. A clear strategy emerged to support women through policy, funding commitment, the expansion of specialist services, and links between statutory and third sector organisations (Plechowicz, 2015). This led to the development of a network of women's centres offering holistic, gender-specific interventions to women in the criminal justice system in conjunction with former Probation Trusts. Women's centres offer gender-informed, needs-based, holistic, individualised services (Gelsthorpe and Hedderman, 2012). The principles that drive service delivery reflect those identified as important to supporting desistance, including treating each woman as an individual and supporting self-determination by increasing her capacity to take responsibility for her own life. Importantly, however, service provision also recognises the impact that victimisation and isolation by disadvantage can have on a woman's circumstances and behaviour, along with the impact of shame and stigma that many women experience as a result of a number of life experiences including imprisonment, mental illness, drug dependency, and single motherhood. However, as demonstrated by the limited attention to

women in the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014, specialist provision for women is particularly vulnerable to changeable political priorities (Annison, Brayford and Deering, 2015). Whilst arguments for a 'distinct approach' (Corston, 2007) to interventions with women in the justice system have been incorporated into official penal policy (for example, Ministry of Justice, 2018a), meaningful gender-responsive practices in prison and the community are only just starting to materialise (Ministry of Justice, 2018c), and they are being driven as much by philanthropy as government (Ministry of Justice, 2018a).

## 2.6. Conclusion

This review has considered the desistance literature as it relates specifically to themes of relationships, restoration, responsibility, and recovery. Mainstream desistance research has been juxtaposed with scholarship that focuses on women's desistance. This analysis highlights that whilst some of the factors that are important to the desistance process are similar for all genders, there is evidence within these themes that some factors are more or less significant for women than men, and that gender impacts on how these processes are experienced.

Empirical research on women's experiences of desistance has started to highlight the limitations of desistance theorising that results from the assumed gender neutrality of the ideas. This scholarship has identified how processes associated with desistance are mediated by gender and/or sex. Importantly, these studies focus on contextualising women's experiences of desistance within the political, social, and personal realities of their lives. That said, examining the desistance literature from a feminist perspective reveals some ongoing limitations in relation to this study. Firstly, much of the empirical research on women's desistance has been undertaken outside the UK, primarily in the USA (Cobbina, 2016; Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013), with some key studies with women in Australia (McIvor et al., 2009; Sheehan and Trotter, 2018). This raises questions about how far cultural context may have shaped the research findings. Österman (2018) provides the only cross-cultural study of women's desistance, comparing experiences of women in England and Sweden, and makes the point that, *'It is the case that criminal justice is inevitably a reflection of broader processes and conditions in a society, many of which are linked to*

*multifaceted aspects of culture'* (Osterman, 2018: 32). Secondly, whilst the research on women's desistance has revealed and examined some of the gendered challenges women experience in maintaining desistance, it largely accepts the conceptualisations of relationships, identity transformation, agency, and practice that can support change presented by the general desistance literature. Thirdly, both the general desistance literature and studies of women's desistance acknowledge the significance of traumatic experiences in pathways into and out of crime, but offer no detailed analysis of how these impact on the processes associated with desistance. Finally, there has been limited consideration of how to apply desistance theories to practice in a way that is gender-informed.

The next part of the literature review examines relevant literature on trauma and trauma recovery and its significance to our understandings of women's offending and desistance.

### 3. Literature review part 2:

## Trauma-informed perspectives on women's offending and desistance.

Part one of the literature review outlined some key questions posed by scholars of women's desistance that challenge the apparent gender-neutrality of desistance theories. This second part of the literature review analyses the extent to which theories of trauma and trauma recovery are relevant to understanding women's offending and efforts to leave crime behind after prison.

There is copious evidence indicating that experiences of trauma and abuse are rife among women in the justice system (for example, Covington 2008; Fedock, Fries and Kubiak, 2013; Ministry of Justice 2018a) and are frequently a catalyst to their involvement in crime (for example, Belknap, 2007; Daly, 1994; Gelsthorpe and Wright, 2015). The recent UK government's 'Female Offender Strategy' (Ministry of Justice, 2018a) echoes the Corston Report's (2007) findings that women in the justice system can be particularly vulnerable in both the prevalence and complexity of their needs. Many lead lifestyles characterised by multiple disadvantage including substance misuse, mental illness, homelessness, economic deprivation, and offending behaviour that are frequently the product of histories of abuse and trauma (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). The strategy contains a commitment to implementing a trauma-informed approach to working with women in the justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2018a).

Analysis of the links between trauma and offending in the lives of women in the justice system has not been matched by consideration of how trauma perspectives might inform our understanding of women's desistance, as Evans (2018: 135-136) states '*mainstream criminology has had very little to say about women's desistance and knows very little about the experiences that women go through before, during and after they break the law.*' It is these experiences that are the focus of this chapter. To begin, the chapter reviews available data on the prevalence of trauma symptoms among women in the justice system. Next, it outlines the definitions, principles, and processes of trauma, and their associations with women's



offending and desistance. This is followed by an examination of 'adverse childhood experiences' and available research on their impact on criminogenic behaviours and desistance. Finally, the review analyses the points of convergence and divergence between desistance and trauma-informed approaches specifically in relation to the four domains that are the focus of this study.

### 3.1. Experiences of trauma and women's offending

Research consistently finds a higher prevalence of experiences of childhood and domestic abuse among women in prison compared to both men in prison and the general population. Among the *Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction* cohort, 53% of women and 27% of men reported having experienced some sort of abuse in the home. Of these, 67% of women and 24% of men reported sexual abuse. Additionally 50% of the women and 40% of the men reported witnessing violence in home (Williams, Papadopoulou and Booth, 2012). Studies generally report the proportion of women in prison in England who have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse to be between 50-80% (Norman and Barron, 2011; Ministry of Justice, 2018b; Prison Reform Trust, 2017; Women in Prison, 2017). Whilst there is debate about the nature of the association between victimisation experiences and offending behaviour in women, it is incontrovertible that a relationship exists (Blanchette and Brown, 2006). This is not to say that victimisation causes women's offending, but that mechanisms developed to cope with victimisation can be criminogenic (Bloom, Owen and Covington, 2003; Daly, 1994; Gelsthorpe, 2009; van Wormer, 2010). Women frequently come into the criminal justice system as a result of the criminalisation of their striving to survive experiences of persistent abuse and repeated trauma (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2013; Daly, 1994; DeHart, Lynch, Belknap, Dass-Brailsford and Green, 2014).

Trauma is often at the root of mental health and substance misuse problems for women in the criminal justice system (Alleyne, 2006; Bloom and Covington, 1998; Corston, 2007; Covington and Bloom, 2006; van Wormer, 2010). Mental health symptoms and diagnoses are elevated among the prisoner population generally, however a UK Ministry of Justice study on gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners found a higher prevalence of *all* mental health disorders in women (Light, Grant and Hopkins, 2013). In this study, 14% of women and 7% of men serving prison sentences were found to have a

psychotic disorder. 25% of women and 15% of men in prison reported symptoms indicative of psychosis. 30% of women had had a previous psychiatric admission before entering prison. 49% of women and 23% of male prisoners were assessed as suffering from anxiety and depression. 46% of women prisoners reported having attempted suicide at some point in their lives (Light et al., 2013). Women accounted for 19% of all self-harm incidents in 2017 despite representing under 5% of the total prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2018b).

Rates of substance use and drug related offending are also higher among women in prison. 58% of women in prison reported problems with class A drug use (Light et al., 2013). 72% of women in secure drug treatment are there for opiate addiction compared to 48% of men (Ministry of Justice, 2018b). 66% of women report committing crime to obtain money for drugs, compared to 38% of men (Ministry of Justice 2018b).

Bloom and Covington (2008) make the point that although posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a common diagnosis associated with abuse, the most common mental health problem for women who are trauma survivors is depression. Light et al. (2013) found an association between depression and anxiety and reconviction for women who have been in prison. Women suffering from both depression and anxiety were significantly more likely to be reconvicted in the year after release than those without such symptoms (66% compared to 31% percent respectively). Bloom and Covington (2008) note that despite having been in mental health treatment, some women continued to engage in criminal behaviour. They hypothesise that women's mental health disorders are often trauma-related and previous treatment has focused on the psychological aftereffects of the victimisation, the substance misuse, the self-harm, the diagnosed mental disorder, but not the trauma itself. This hypothesis has particular significance when considering how best to support women's desistance.

Childhood victimisation has been shown to have important effects on the likelihood of offending for all genders. However, the studies show significant correlations between childhood histories of adversity and adult adaptations that are particularly relevant to understanding women's crime (Herman, 1992/2015). This corresponds with feminist pathways to crime theories (Daly 1994; Salisbury and van Voorhis, 2009; van Wormer, 2010), a major tenet of which argue that women's crime is a survival strategy interlinked with a variety of problems, including non-victimisation adversity such as inequality, poverty, and

powerlessness, as well as childhood trauma, and subsequent poor mental health (Bloom, 1997/2013; Covington, 2008; Turner, Finklehor and Ormod, 2006).

Despite the relationships between trauma, drug dependency, mental health problems, and offending, there is little explicit reference to them in the desistance literature. Arguably, this reflects the findings from the desistance research that factors that contribute to the onset of criminal behaviour are not the same as those that support its termination (Laub and Sampson, 2001). However, it may also be symptomatic of the 'gender-blind' approach taken by much of the desistance scholarship. Given the lower prevalence of trauma among the male prisoner population, particularly abuse that persists into adulthood, it may not feature so prominently in their narratives of post-prison desistance. The remainder of this review examines definitions, processes, responses to, and symptoms of trauma, suggesting that treating pathways into and out of crime as unconnected limits criminology's capacity to understand or theorise models of practice to support women's desistance.

## 3.2. Trauma: definitions, processes, and responses

### 3.2.1. Definitions of trauma and complex trauma

There is no agreed definition of trauma. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) defines trauma as '*exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation*' (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This definition is necessarily restrictive, functioning as it does as the basis for diagnoses of PTSD. The WHO International Classification of Diseases, 10th edition (ICD-10) requirement for PTSD, and so the implicit definition of trauma is, '*a stressful event or situation (of either brief or long duration) of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone*' (World Health Organization, 2010). In allowing for an individual's subjective interpretation of the experience, this definition reflects theories supporting the idea of a spectrum of traumatic responses, ranging from the effects of a single overwhelming event to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse. This definition, therefore, is more in line with definitions of '*complex trauma*' (Herman, 1992).

'Complex trauma' refers to types of trauma that occur repeatedly and cumulatively over a period of time, and often within family and other intimate relationships from which the victim cannot physically or psychologically escape (Courtois, 2004; Herman, 1992/2015). Though the symptoms for PTSD were categorised from work with war veterans, researchers in the 1970s began routinely applying the diagnostic criteria of PTSD to syndromes experienced by survivors of rape, domestic abuse, and child abuse, recognising similarity in survivors' presenting symptoms (Herman 1992/2015). Understandings of complex trauma were heavily influenced by the feminist movement. Women's consciousness raising groups that were a foundation of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s created space for women to discuss the violence and abuse they experienced in the home. They were based on women openly sharing their stories, and providing validation and support, helping '*overcome barriers of denial, secrecy and shame*' (Herman, 1992/2015: 29). These remain core goals of trauma-informed practice (Harris and Fallot, 2001). As a result, constructions of complex trauma include an explicitly gendered understanding of trauma and its responses (Herman, 1992/2015), offering a comprehensive view of trauma that recognises the interactions of psychosocial and structural stressors (Bloom, 1997/2013; Ringel and Brandell, 2012).

Traumatic events can take many forms, including catastrophic injury and illnesses, discrimination, emotional, sexual, or physical abuse, including intimate partner abuse, assault, and rape (Herman 1992/2015; Covington and Russo, 2016). Trauma can be both an event and a response to an event that causes debilitating fear and powerlessness, it is '*an inescapable stressful event that overwhelms one's existing coping mechanisms*' (van der Kolk and Fflesher, 1995: 506). Whilst broad definitions such as this risk negating the meaning of trauma, the focus on how the individual responds to the trauma and the extent to which they are able to assimilate their experiences within the broader context of their lives has particular resonance with aspects of desistance theory.

### 3.2.2. Symptoms of trauma

Symptoms of trauma as they relate to specific findings from this research will be examined more comprehensively in the relevant chapters of this thesis. At this point, it is important to provide a brief overview of trauma symptoms, their relationship to offending behaviour, and their implications for desistance.

Herman (1992/2015: 35-47) explains that trauma symptoms fall into three main categories. The first is *hyperarousal*. This reflects the persistent expectation of danger and can manifest as both generalised anxiety and specific fears related to the trauma. It can result in irritability and explosive anger. The second is *intrusion*. This is the reliving of the trauma in the present life in a way that is not within the control of the survivor, such as flashbacks and nightmares. Seemingly insignificant places or events can trigger a memory of the trauma. This has implications specifically in relation to the normal development of 'self schemas;' concepts of the self in relation to the world (Horowitz cited in Herman 1992/2015: 41). The third is *constriction*. This refers to a state of surrender that can take the form of emotional detachment and passivity (Herman 1992/2015). In the trauma literature, this is termed dissociation and can be crucial to psychologically surviving the traumatic event. Those who do not spontaneously dissociate may seek similar affects through alcohol and substance use (Herman 1992/2015). Aggression, dissociation, and substance misuse can be criminogenic, therefore symptoms of trauma have behavioural manifestations that are relevant to offending.

In the current policy climate around personality disorder (Durkan and Saunders, 2015; Craissati, Joseph and Skett, 2015), individuals suffering the aftereffects of trauma risk being misdiagnosed as having personality disorder as, Herman (1992/2015: 117) explains, '*The clinical picture of a person who has been reduced to elemental concerns of survival is still frequently mistaken for a portrait of the victim's underlying character.*' Concerns have been raised about the expansive application of the personality disorder label to women in the justice system, resulting from the implementation of the Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) policy, despite the fact that few women meet the dangerousness criteria that determines access for men (Player, 2016). Player (2016) argues that the OPD pathway, whilst providing women in the justice system with necessary access to psychological intervention, does so in a way that pathologises and individualises their experiences, applies diagnoses that are stigmatising and alienating in an environment that is coercive, and does so within a policy context that was designed to manage dangerous violent and sexual offending by men. By contrast, trauma theory interprets aggression, dissociation, substance use, emotional lability, and personality disorder as symptoms rather than underlying conditions (Herman 1992/2015). Trauma-informed approaches see the problem with traditional responses as that

they are incomplete; seeking to treat the symptoms, without addressing, or possibly even recognising, their root causes (Harris and Falloot, 2001). From this perspective, supporting women's efforts to leave crime behind demands attention to the root causes of trauma that result in criminogenic behaviours.

### 3.3 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), neurobiology, attachments, and the damaged self.

Trauma impacts biopsychosocial development (van der Kolk, 2014). The following review considers how childhood adversity can affect neurobiological development, relational attachments, and existential integrity, and how developmental ruptures in these areas can be associated with offending and desistance.

#### 3.3.1. Adverse Childhood Experiences

Since this research began there has been a growing policy focus on 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACEs) across UK public services including health, child safeguarding, education (Science and Technology Select Committee, 2018), and justice (Ministry of Justice, 2018a).

ACEs originally developed in the USA for the ACE study (Kaiser Permanente/Center for Disease Control 1995 -1997). The ACE study asked participants to complete a ten-item questionnaire about direct and indirect harms experienced before the age of eighteen, namely experiences of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, witnessing domestic abuse, household substance abuse, household mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and having an incarcerated household member (Felitti et al., 1998). Empirical evaluations have shown that ACEs are common, highly interrelated, and exert a powerful cumulative effect on human development (Anda, Butchart, Felitti, & Brown, 2010). Results of numerous ACE studies have found that as the number of ACEs increase in the population studied, so too do the risks of experiencing a range of physical and mental health problems in adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998). Scores of four or more on the ACE questionnaire are associated with smoking, obesity, alcoholism, risky sexual behaviour,

and intravenous drug use. They are also powerful predictors of clinical depression and suicidal ideation.

With regard to gender differences in ACE exposure, women are more likely than men to have a score of five or more (Baglivio et al., 2014). Baglivio et al.'s (2014) study with juveniles in the justice system found girls had a higher prevalence than boys on every ACE indicator. The most pronounced difference can be seen in the prevalence of sexual abuse, which was reported 4.4 times more frequently by girls. This echoes findings of prior studies that report higher levels of exposure to sexual assault and interpersonal victimization among girls in the justice system, (Cauffman, Feldman, Waterman, & Steiner, 1998; Wood, Foy, Layne, Pynoos and James, 2002) and reflects the prevalence of abuse reported by women and men in prison. ACEs are also indirectly related to ongoing victimisation (Arias, 2004).

Experiences of trauma have been shown to be correlated with offending behaviour. For example, those involved in the justice system are more likely to report greater exposure to traumatic events (Baglivio et al., 2014). Those in the system with higher ACE scores also tended to reoffend more quickly after completing a community-based sentence relative to their counterparts with lower ACE scores (Wolff, Baglivio, Piquero and Epps, 2017). A UK study found an increased likelihood of spending a night in police or prison custody and involvement in violence, both as victim and offender, to be associated with higher ACE scores (Bellis, Lowey, Leckenby, Hughes and Harrison, 2014).

Studies in life-course criminology have highlighted the role childhood adversity can play in shaping patterns of offending and desistance (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Smith and Farrington, 2004). However, Craig (2019) argues that the subsequent research on the interplay of social and subjective factors in desistance has largely omitted examination of childhood adversity (Craig, 2019). She argues that early childhood trauma may help explain why some people are able to identify and take advantage of 'hooks for change' and others are not, as childhood victimisation has been found not only to increase the likelihood of offending but also to adversely affect the ability to form social bonds and attachments (Craig, 2019; Ansbro, 2008, 2019). At present, much of the research on the relationship between ACEs and offending has been undertaken with young people, so their correlation to repeated offending is yet to be conclusively determined. That said, Craig et al.'s (2017) research reported that a relationship between ACEs and recidivism among young people in

the justice system endured even when they had established social bonds. Though ACEs have not been found to be significant in reoffending for women, they are correlated with symptoms, including anxiety and depression, which have been found to be impact on women's recidivism (Anumba, Dematteo and Heibrun, 2012; Light et al., 2013). In sum, these studies indicate that early traumatic experiences not only increase an individual's likelihood of offending and recidivism, but they also decrease their ability to form social bonds, a factor cited in the literature as pivotal to successful desistance (Laub and Sampson, 1993, 2003).

### 3.3.2 Trauma and neurobiological development

A detailed analysis of the neurobiological impacts of trauma is beyond the scope of this review. That said, there are findings from the field that are of relevance to understanding the link between trauma and women's desistance as they explain how some responses to trauma are apparent in women's criminogenic needs, including risk-taking behaviour, substance misuse, personality disorder, and relationship difficulties. Therefore, I will examine aspects of neurobiological development that have particular resonance with women's offending and desistance.

Trauma has been shown to have visible impacts on the brain. It can contribute to amnesia, disassociation, and abnormal regulation in the medial pre-frontal cortex and amygdala<sup>5</sup> making it harder to control emotions and impulses (Bloom, 1997/2013; van der Kolk, 2014). Exposure to trauma is not limited to experiencing or witnessing traumatic events. It can also result from *toxic stress* and *allostatic load* (Bloom, 1997/2013; McEwen, 2003). Toxic stress occurs as a result of repeated, prolonged and intense activation of the brain's stress response in response to trauma. When toxic stress is experienced in childhood it can alter brain functioning with problematic long term consequences. The concept is being used as a way of understanding the effects of prolonged childhood abuse. Allostatic load refers to the wear and tear on the body and brain resulting from unremitting over-activity of the physiological systems normally involved in adapting to environmental challenges. In trauma

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<sup>5</sup> The amygdala alerts us to danger by triggering fear responses in the body. The medial pre-frontal cortex regulates these instinctive emotional responses.



theory, it relates to a relentless stress that results from prolonged childhood adversity (Bloom 1997/2013; van der Kolk, 2014). Persistent socio-structural adversity over the life-course such as poverty, intersectional discrimination, lone parenting, lack of opportunity, and multi-generational caregiving can increase allostatic load and these disproportionately affect women (Covington, 2017).

Neurobiological perspectives on trauma provide insight into the associations between victimisation and offending-related behaviours linked to emotional dysregulation such as substance misuse, aggression, lack of empathy, and poor social connectedness. Van der Kolk (2014) explains that the automatic nervous system responds to a threat in three ways. Humans' first response to danger is social engagement; we call out for help or seek emotional support from others. If this fails, we revert to more primitive modes of survival; flight or fight. If we cannot fight back or escape, we go into a state of freeze or collapse (van der Kolk, 2014: 80). This last resort is the most likely response to prolonged victimisation, when victims are physically, emotionally, and psychologically constrained by the abuser (van der Kolk, 2014; Bloom 1997/2013). Being stuck in survival mode inhibits our human capacity to form relational bonds, interact empathically with others, and achieve personal fulfilment (van der Kolk, 2014). Our most overwhelming emotional responses to trauma are often depicted physically as gut-wrenching, heart-breaking, or as physical collapse. Van der Kolk explains the impact of these responses on behaviour, *'We'll do anything to make these awful, visceral sensations go away, whether it is clinging desperately to another human being, rendering ourselves invisible with drugs or alcohol, or taking a knife to the skin to replace overwhelming emotions with definable sensations'* (van der Kolk, 2014: 76). Neurobiological responses to trauma suggest why, when examining victimisation and abuse, separating factors that contribute to offending from those that contribute to desistance is problematic, as these responses can result in behaviours that contribute to offending and from which recovery will be necessary for successful desistance.

There are uneasy echoes of classical criminology's reductionist and paternalistic interpretations of women's crime as symptomatic of emotional neuroses in these ideas. Countering these concerns, trauma theorists stress that neurobiology is only one element of holistic biopsychosocial understandings of trauma responses (van der Kolk, 2014; Courtois and Ford, 2016). They do not suggest direct links between experiencing trauma and

offending. Arguments that these theories represent a regressive return to determinism are challenged by assertions that negative impacts of trauma on the brain can be healed or managed without medication, for example through mindfulness practice and self-soothing exercises (Covington and Russo, 2016; Courtois, 2004; Elliot, Bjelajac, Fallot, Markoff and Reed, 2005; van der Kolk, 2014).

### 3.3.3. Trauma and attachment

Attachment theories (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall, 2015; Bowlby, 1969) provide another perspective through which to understand the impact of childhood adversity on healthy development. Attachment theories examine how early emotional attachments affect adult relational development. Attachment research found that children need security, a quality of care that is sufficiently responsive to the child's needs, in order to alleviate anxiety and engender a feeling of being understood. Secure attachment is an essential ingredient of emotional and cognitive growth that allows infants to learn to recognise their own and read others' emotions (Bowlby, 1969). Research found that when secure attachment was missing, emotional development was likely to suffer and manifest in a range of ways including a lack of concern for others and difficulties forming relationships. When parents are distant or overly intrusive, children develop defensive strategies in order to feel safe, to moderate intense emotional states and relieve frustration and pain (Ainsworth et al., 2015).

Mary Ainsworth identified two types of insecure attachment; avoidant and ambivalent. Parents of children with an avoidant attachment style tend to be emotionally unavailable or unresponsive to them. They disregarded or ignored their children's needs, discouraged crying, and encouraged premature independence in their children. The child learns early in life to suppress the natural desire to seek out a parents for comfort when frightened, distressed, or in pain. Ambivalent insecure attachment can result when parents vacillate between different responses to their children, who as a result become confused and insecure. They often have a negative self-image but positive views of other people, especially their parents (Ainsworth et al., 2015). As adults, those who experienced avoidant attachment in childhood tend to repeat this their own adult relationships by avoiding intimacy and empathy. Ambivalently attached children tend to develop 'preoccupied' styles of attachment as adults, anxiously alternating between a wish for intimacy and a need for distance (Ansbro,

2008). Insecure attachment styles have been linked with psychological conditions associated with personality disorder such as emotional instability, insecure relationships, and self-harm (Courtois, 2004).

The link between trauma, damaged attachments, and the ability to form relational and social bonds is of relevance to desistance. Allwood and Widom (2013) found that individuals with substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect were less likely to achieve prosocial roles later in life, such as marriage and employment. Among those who did marry, histories of physical or sexual abuse were a predictor of divorce or separation from their spouse. Craig's (2019) research found that marriage promotes desistance among those with a lower number of ACEs, but for women with higher ACE scores, the social bond is insufficient to overcome the harmful effects of ACEs on repeat offending. This was not the case for men, however, as marriage was still salient among men with high ACEs (Craig, 2019). This parallels prior findings that report marriage is more likely to lead to desistance for men than women (Giordano et al., 2002; King, Massoglia, and Ross, 2007; Leverentz, 2006, 2014).

Like ACEs, attachment theories have been criticised as overly deterministic in recognition that the majority of people who experience childhood adversity and insecure attachments develop normally (Ansbro, 2019). Feminist critiques have also highlighted the focus on maternal care-giving in the early theorising around attachment as a tendency of patriarchal socio-cultural contexts to 'blame the mother' for all of society's ills. However, considered together, the links between adverse childhood experiences and attachment theories offer a way of understanding offending-related behaviours in the context of the impact of early trauma and the subsequent mediating psychological processes on healthy relational development in adulthood that is identified as important to successful desistance (Ansbro, 2008).

### 3.3.4 Trauma, agency, and identity

Other developmental difficulties observed in those with complex trauma adaptations relate to identity and the sense of self. Developmental trauma survivors often develop cognitive distortions about themselves, their worth in relationships, and the motivations of others (Pearlman and Courtois, 2005). Constructivist Self Development Theory (CTSD) (McCann and

Pearlman, 1992) is an *'integrative personality theory that describes the impact of a traumatic event (or traumatic context) on the development of self'* (Saakvitne et al., 1998: 282). It is a framework that explains psychological adaptations to severe trauma, including why some survivors experience positive personal transformation in the aftermath of trauma when others barely survive. According to CSDT, through one's unique history, a person develops cognitive schemas; beliefs, expectations, and assumptions about oneself, other people, and the world according to which they organise information and frame future experiences (Pearlman and Courtois, 2005). Six psychological needs are identified which are particularly affected by trauma: safety, trust, esteem (from and towards others), independence, power or control over others, and intimacy and connectedness (Saakvitne et al., 1998; Pearlman and Courtois, 2005). The different salience of these needs, as well as differences in individual resources, social, and interpersonal contexts means individuals will respond differently to similar events (Saakvitne et al. 1998). CSDT suggests that *traumatic* stressors are those which cannot be assimilated into existing cognitive schemas, but instead require modifications to those schemas. In CSDT, trauma arises in the interaction between the event, the individual's frames of meaning, and the ability of the individual to make sense of the trauma within existing cognitive schema (Courtois, 2004). Moreover, they acknowledge the particularly damaging impacts of trauma within developmental periods when identity and basic schemas are emerging, in particular early childhood and young adulthood.

CSDT responds to some of the criticisms levelled at findings of the ACE study, neurobiological explanations of trauma, and attachment theories, namely that they are overly deterministic, negate the role of agency, and fail to explain the diversity of responses to similarly stressful or traumatic life events. It recognises the active role of human beings in constructing their personal realities or representational models of the world. As such, CSDT recognises a role for both agency and identity in trauma recovery as *'the individual's unique history shapes his or her experience of traumatic events and defines the adaptation to trauma'* (McCann and Pearlman, 1992: 189).

Though differently focused, neurobiological, relational, and psychological frameworks for understanding trauma complement rather than contradict each other. Taken together they explain trauma adaptations as biopsychosocial responses developed for the purposes of

survival. When these adaptations become problematic, they can be linked to offending behaviour. Though there has been no research on ACEs, attachment, and desistance among women, they are correlated with symptoms, including anxiety and depression, which have been found to be impact on women's recidivism (Light et al., 2013).

### 3.4 Points of congruence and divergence between desistance and trauma-informed approaches.

The following section of this review considers the points of congruence between desistance theories and principles of trauma-informed systems in order to analyse the extent to which trauma-informed approaches can address some of the omissions in the desistance literature in relation to women.

#### 3.4.1 Processes of desistance and recovery from trauma

Both desistance and trauma recovery are psychosocial processes. However, trauma recovery additionally includes processes for responding to biological and physical symptoms of trauma that, as will be illustrated later (see chapter seven), has particular relevance to women's desistance.

Herman (1992/2015) identifies three fundamental stages to the trauma recovery process that have some correspondence with notions of primary, secondary and tertiary desistance (McNeill, 2014). The first is establishing *safety*. Like primary desistance, this is the point the individual instigates change. In both recovery and desistance this constitutes accepting the reality of one's condition and taking action to change it (Herman 1992/2015; Maruna et al., 2004). The difference in terminology is significant for women as the notion of establishing safety makes it explicit that although there are aspects of the individual's behaviour that need to change, the context is important. It infers a need for the provision of physical safety. It implies mutual responsibility for change, that once the decision is made by the individual, they receive the practical and emotional support required to establish safety. The second stage is *emotional processing*. In processes of desistance and trauma recovery, at this stage individuals revise their self-narratives or scripts for the purposes of integrating them into a

new identity. In both paradigms, re-scripting involves coming to terms with the past in order to create a new future (Herman, 1992/2015). That said, there are important distinctions between the two approaches. In desistance theories, this process involves the reframing of the individual's 'bad' behaviour as a necessary precursor to the emergence of their new selves (Maruna, 2001). In trauma theory, the past experiences that need to be re-scripted do not relate to what the survivors did, but what was done *to* them. The third stage is *restoring connection*. Similarly to tertiary desistance, in this stage the focus is on developing a new life in relation to others (Herman, 1992/2015; McNeill, 2014). In desistance, the focus is on belonging, on the desister being accepted as having changed by the wider community (McNeill, 2014). In trauma recovery, at this stage identity transformation is still a work in progress and one whose progression depends on reconnection with the self and others (Courtois and Ford, 2016; Herman 1992/2015). However, in both, the importance of developing and deepening positive relationships that can support sustained change is central.

It has been argued that framing desistance as a sequential process has limitations in that it does not adequately reflect the fractured nature of the desistance journey (Nugent and Schinkel, 2016). By contrast, trauma-informed approaches are structured according to Herman's (1992/2015) staged model intentionally to address problems and develop skills at specific stages of the process. The early stage is devoted to the development of the practitioner-service user relationship, developing capacities for emotional regulation, finding safety, and skills-building. These foundations provide the service user with adequate emotional modulation and coping skills to undertake more in-depth work on resolving the trauma in stage two. The work on trauma resolution prepares the individual for the final stage, engagement with a life that is less encumbered by the original trauma and its aftermath (Courtois, 2004). However, as with desistance, trauma-informed approaches recognise the likelihood of progress and relapse within each stage (Courtois, 2004; Herman 1992/2015).

As well as similarities in the *process* of change within desistance and trauma discourses, there are also points of congruence and divergence in desistance and trauma-informed *approaches* to sustaining change. These will now be examined with reference to the areas identified by the women in this study as significant to their desistance processes.

### 3.4.2. Relationships in trauma recovery and desistance.

Both desistance and trauma-informed approaches recognise that change and healing need to take place within a context of supportive and safe interpersonal relationships (Elliot et al., 2005; Pearlman and Courtois, 2005; Rex, 1999). In professional settings, both approaches hinge on the establishment of an open and collaborative relationship between the practitioner and the service user. Both acknowledge the expertise of the service user and demand attention to the power imbalances that exist between practitioners and service users (Harris and Falloot, 2001). Desistance and trauma informed approaches draw on attachment theory in recognising the practitioner's role in acting as a 'secure base' for the service user (Ansbro 2008, 2019; Pearlman and Courtois, 2005). In desistance, these attachments are conceptualised primarily as future-focused; building motivation and brokering access to social capital and practical support. However, of relevance to criminalised women, in trauma recovery work, a specific purpose of these attachments is to create a safe space in which to actively process and resolve the trauma (Courtois, 2004), a necessary component of healing and recovery.

The value of personal relationships in supporting change and healing are also acknowledged in both desistance and trauma-informed approaches. Both comment on the need to promote healthy connections to family, children, friends, and the wider community (Covington 2008; Weaver, 2011). However, generalised desistance theories tend to pay little attention to the violence, abuse, and disconnection that characterise the many of the relationship experiences of women in the justice system. Models of relationship building in trauma-recovery focus on consciously building connection based on mutuality, empathy, stability, and empowerment in purposeful purposefully contrast with the physical and existential destruction and ruptures that are a feature of abusive relationships (Covington 2008; Elliot et al., 2005; Herman 1991/2015).

### 3.4.3. Restoring a sense of self in trauma recovery and desistance

The trauma literature details the harm trauma inflicts on an individual's sense of self (Courtois, 2004; Herman, 1992/2015; Pearlman and Courtois, 2005; van der Kolk, 2014). A core component of trauma-informed care therefore is supporting the survivor in reconstructing their story. In both trauma-informed and desistance philosophies, developing a new narrative through which the individual can make sense of their experiences and through which future interactions and experiences can be framed is the foundation for a secure sense of self (Pearlman and Courtois, 2005; Covington, 2008; Maruna, 2001; Rumgay, 2004). In common with desistance approaches, trauma-informed approaches emphasise understanding the whole person and the context in which they are living, rather than focusing on discrete problems or symptoms (Harris and Fallot, 2001; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). In the desistance literature, identity transformation relies on identifying and acting on opportunities in social life, such as employment and parenthood, that support de-labelling and offer alternative, conventional identities (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub and Sampson, 2003). Supporting integration into social life is also important to trauma recovery. Where the approaches diverge is that the trauma literature focuses on internal processes of identity transformation. Trauma-informed approaches encourage redefinition of the self through developing autonomy, overcoming shame, regaining control, and reconciling with oneself, as opposed to adopting new roles (Elliot et al., 2005; Herman, 1992/2015). The focus is on internally reconnecting with the self, on reducing shame and stigma, thus addressing some of the obstacles to conformity that criminalised women may face.

### 3.4.4. Developing personal responsibility in trauma recovery and desistance

As discussed in section 2.2, the exercise of agency is a feature of successful desistance. Trauma-informed practice also encourages personal responsibility for change. However, understandings of responsibility in trauma recovery incorporate some of the issues that pose a challenge to the exercise of agency for women that, from a gendered perspective, are under-theorised in the desistance literature.



The emphasis in trauma-informed approaches is on creating a distinction between blame and responsibility (Harris and Fallot, 2001). In this way, trauma-informed approaches clearly place the blame for past abuse with the perpetrator and systems that failed to intervene. But this does not leave the individual as a passive victim with no power. The responsibility for change lies with her and those she chooses to support her (Harris and Fallot, 2001). This clear distinction avoids the potential for neo-liberal interpretations of personal responsibility. Rather, this is an *empowerment* approach that seeks to increase the woman's power in personal and social spheres (Harris and Fallot, 2001). These approaches are entirely consistent with those advocated by desistance theories. One area where they diverge, however, is that trauma-informed approaches also acknowledge and seek to address the gendered structural barriers to the exercise of agency. Trauma theories recognise that exerting agency is impeded when control and autonomy are individually and systematically constricted. Consequently, political empowerment and a commitment to understanding women's problems as created and influenced by a patriarchal socio-political context are explicitly incorporated into trauma-informed approaches to change (Elliot et al., 2005).

### 3.4.5. Processes of recovery

Both desistance and trauma-informed approaches to recovery or rehabilitation are strengths-based. They seek to identify the adaptations an individual has used and resources they have access to and build on these (Elliot et al., 2005; McNeill, 2006). A collaborative practitioner-service user alliance is central to both models and, beyond this, both see co-production as an ultimate goal of service development; that service users should be involved in the design and ongoing evaluation of treatment services (Elliot et al; 2005; Weaver, 2011). Desistance approaches to recovery/rehabilitation are intentionally non-specific. For instance, the Good Lives Model (eg: Ward and Fortune, 2013) offers a framework for desistance-informed rehabilitative practice and like trauma-informed approaches, emphasises a holistic understanding of behaviour and the importance of addressing both internal and external obstacles to change. Unlike trauma-informed approaches however, it stops short of specifying modes of intervention, nor does it offer guidance on the therapeutic approach (Purvis, Ward and Willis, 2011).

Supporting women's desistance and recovery has received little attention from those developing frameworks for desistance-informed practice (Evans, 2018). There have been few examinations of desistance approaches to rehabilitation from a gendered perspective (an exception being Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts, 2009). By contrast, there is a burgeoning literature on trauma-informed practice approaches and a considerable portion of this literature considers gender as a core consideration in service design and delivery. As such, it has particular resonance for supporting women's desistance.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides a brief overview of definitions, processes, and symptoms of trauma, their role in offending, and the relevance of gender in theories of complex trauma. It explains the points of convergence and divergence in the desistance and trauma literatures. There are a number of questions remaining about the validity of constructions of trauma and mental health diagnoses as they apply to women in the justice system. Rates of depression and anxiety among women in prison are consistently reported to be high, however there is inconsistency as to whether studies are reporting diagnosed or self-reported conditions. Commentators have also drawn attention to the potential gender bias in assessment instruments such as the DSM-V, particularly in reference to the presentation and prevalence of PTSD (Carragher et al., 2016; Lilly, Pole, Best, Metzler and Marmar, 2009; Hartung and Widiger, 1998). There is ongoing debate about the cross-cultural validity of the PTSD diagnosis, indicating that there are possible cultural variations in the impacts and presentations of trauma. There has also been criticism that the DSM-V diagnostic criteria for personality disorder contribute to gender-bias in assessment. It has been found that clinicians are more likely to diagnose borderline, histrionic, and dependent personality disorder in women, suggesting that the DSM-V diagnostic criteria pathologises characteristics traditionally stereotyped as 'female' (Hartung and Lefter, 2019; Player, 2016). Furthermore, there is debate about the extent to which borderline personality disorder and complex PTSD are separate diagnoses (Ford and Courtois, 2014). Borderline personality disorder has been heavily criticised for its lack of validity, inflated co-morbidity rates and overall unreliability (Lewis and Grenyer, 2009). In criminal justice settings in England and Wales, gender differences in the criteria that determine inclusion in the OPD pathway mean

that, unlike men, the personality disorder label can be applied to women who do not pose a risk of harm. Debate also continues around the validity of the ACE study. In common with the studies of women's desistance, much of the work on ACEs, trauma, and trauma recovery emanates from the USA. That said, the ACE study has been replicated globally and its findings are largely reported to have cross-cultural validity (for example, Hughes et al., 2017; Kessler et al., 2010). Early evaluation of trauma-informed interventions with women in prison in England suggests the constructions of trauma and approaches to intervention can be successfully applied in the UK context (Petrillo et al., 2019), however these evaluations are in their very early days and have yet to specifically examine the cross cultural validity of trauma-informed practice.

A theme running through this review is that symptoms of trauma and criminogenic needs manifest analogously for many women in the justice system. The two bodies of literature on trauma and desistance have developed independently within their separate fields of psychology/psychiatry and criminology, yet there are shared philosophies and ideologies in their principles for helping people sustain positive change. Of particular value to this study, understandings of complex trauma symptoms and recovery, with their roots in feminist activism, may fill the woman-shaped gap in the desistance research and principles for practice thus providing a means of both gendering understandings of the desistance process and supporting women's desistance.

The next chapter of this thesis will outline the methodological approach for the research.

#### 4. A reflexive account of using feminist constructivist grounded theory to explore women's desistance.

This research is primarily a qualitative, longitudinal study of women's experiences of attempting to leave crime behind after prison. It does, however, use some quantitative analysis to examine correlations between specific demographic and crime-related factors and sustaining desistance. These will be examined in chapter five. This chapter reflects on using feminist constructivist grounded theory in the examination of women's desistance.

Farrall et al. (2014: 18) cite a longitudinal research design as the first 'desideratum' for studying desistance. A cross-sectional design would not have achieved this study's aim of investigating the women's experiences of the desistance process. The research employs feminist constructivist grounded theory as the epistemological and methodological approaches to data collection, analysis, and theory development to the extent that it proposes a gender-responsive, trauma-informed framework for understanding and supporting women's desistance.

Both feminist epistemologies and constructivist grounded theory promote researcher reflexivity throughout the research process, urging researchers to abandon claims of value-freedom in favour of critically exploring the impacts of gender, race, social status, and other markers of our own privilege and marginalisation on the process of knowledge production (Charmaz, 2006/2014; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Wuest, 1995). Both reject the possibility of pure objectivity in research, seeking instead 'strong objectivity' (Harding, 1995), requiring that '*the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical plane as the object of knowledge*' (Harding, 1993 cited in Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002: 50). Thus,

In view of the inevitably sensitive nature of this inquiry, a methodology was sought that would reflect feminist approaches to research and, though I was not familiar with the terminology at the time of deciding on a methodology, would also support trauma-informed

research praxis. To this end, this chapter reflects on the research design and processes to outline the rationale for, and application of, constructivist grounded theory as a methodology that upholds and advances the principles of feminist and trauma-informed research.

I begin, however, with some reflections on my positionality as a researcher as these are relevant to decisions about the epistemology, methodology, and methods adopted in this study.

#### 4.1. Researcher positionality: The value and challenges of 'insider-outsider' status.

Linking feminist and constructivist grounded theory epistemology, methodology, and method is the principle of reflexivity. Reflexivity means taking a critical look inward and reflecting on our own values, beliefs, and experiences in order to identify, interrogate, and understand how status characteristics, social background, and assumptions can influence the research process (Harding 1995; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002). A key function of reflexivity is to address the power imbalance in relation to who in the research process has power to make meaning, so that meanings are constructed collaboratively (Hesse-Biber, 2007).

I came to this research with a degree of 'insider' status. A probation officer for twelve years and currently a probation educator, I have extensive experience of working with women in prison and after their release. In many ways, this research is the culmination of eighteen years of incremental experiential and academic knowledge building about the lives of women in the justice system.

The first person I supervised as a trainee Probation Officer was Bintu, a woman from Sierra Leone seeking asylum in the UK. Bintu's father and brother had been killed. She had been raped. She had fled with her three young children and arrived in the UK three years prior to when we met. She had been working in a supermarket and had a small, two-roomed flat on

an estate in south London notorious for drugs, crime, and poverty. Although I was, at this time, too young, naïve, and privileged to understand the trauma she had experienced, I felt a strong sense of injustice that, having survived those experiences, she ended up on probation for stealing £50 from her employer. This had been an act of desperation that I later came to understand as an example of the 'feminization of poverty' and the interactions between social structures and women's personal experiences. Bintu's status meant she could only work a limited number of hours, but problems with her asylum application meant her benefits stopped. She could not earn enough to provide for herself and her children. I was frustrated by the limits of my role and the organisation's resources in being able to offer her meaningful support. One of the first things I did on qualification was compile a directory of local services to which colleagues could refer women for support with a range of welfare-related problems.

Bintu was followed by other women whose stories of trauma and abuse I came to expect, and that fuelled the sense of injustice that, after everything they had experienced, a prison cell was as close as they could come to a place of safety. Over the next ten years, in a range of probation settings including two years in a women's prison, I specialised in work with women. It was clear that probation officers often disliked and avoided working with women, anecdotally describing them as too 'needy,' 'emotionally draining,' 'manipulative' and 'chaotic.' Increasingly, I recognised these behaviours that probation officers were picking up on reflected probation's limited capacity to respond to and support women. Women would often be alone in probation office waiting areas, offending behaviour groups, or unpaid work placements with violent, abusive men whose behaviour was highly unpredictable. In response, I sought more specialist training so that I was better able to support women under my supervision. I trained as a psychotherapist and volunteered in this role at a domestic abuse charity. I also specialised in work with 'high risk' men, particularly those who perpetrated sexual and domestic abuse, as I realised ending violence against women relied on working with the perpetrators of the harm.

Having worked in a women's prison for two years, I was familiar with the operations and culture of imprisonment and fluent in its language at the point of commencing this research. This undoubtedly gave me legitimacy when requesting access to the prison for this research,

and in my interactions with both staff and residents during the research. It also meant I had experiences that shaped my perceptions of life for women in prison prior to this research. In my two years working in prison, I saw, and had to respond to, the repercussions of practice that appalled me, and practice that inspired me. During the data collection phases, I had to use what Dwyer and Buckle (2009: 60) term '*the space between*' being an insider and an outsider. I had to balance using my 'insider' knowledge to gain trust and respect from the prison authorities and staff, against emphasising my current separation from 'the system' to the women.

Working with women who have experienced trauma and victimisation, both within and outside of the justice system, has been a feature of most of my professional life. This research started from insider knowledge of how constrained prison and probation are in their capacity to support women's desistance. This knowledge will have impacted on all aspects of this research from what I heard in the interviews, to how I coded the data, to the theoretical direction of my conclusions. Both feminist and constructivist grounded theorists assert that 'insider' knowledge does not threaten the validity of the research. As long as it is used reflexively and the researcher maintains an open-mind it can be a source of insight (Letherby, 2003).

## 4.2. Principles of feminist epistemology

There is no blueprint for feminist research. While there may be consensus that feminist research brings women's diverse experiences, and the structures that frame those experiences, to the fore, there is ongoing debate not only about the methods used by feminist researchers, but also about the aims of feminist research itself, including in relation to the power differentials between the researcher and researched, accountability, and the potential of the research to create social change (Gelsthorpe and Morris, 1990; Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Reinharz, 1992). Feminism is dynamic. Its concerns shift as new intellectual 'waves' guide feminist thinking (Oleson, 2007). Consequently, instead of a singular feminist methodology, feminist researchers have identified *principles* for conducting feminist research which will now be considered in relation to this study.

#### 4.2.1 Feminist research focuses on topics that are relevant to women

By highlighting the absence of women across a range of academic disciplines, including criminology, feminist academics launched a powerful critique of positivism (Noaks and Wincup, 2004). Indeed, feminists exposed the dominance of the positivist paradigm as rooted not in the perceived validity of its methods, but in its privileged location within the historical and social context of patriarchy (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007). As Hesse-Biber explains, *'To engage in feminist theory and praxis means to challenge knowledge that excludes, while seeming to include – assuming that when we speak of the generic term men, we also mean women, as though what is true for the dominant groups must also be true for women and other oppressed groups'* (Hesse-Biber, 2007:3). Within criminology, feminist critiques were based on the conviction that criminology should better represent the lives of women whose experiences had either been ignored or trivialised (Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013; Naffine, 1997; Smart, 2009). As Frances Heidensohn noted in an early challenge to 'malestream' criminology, virtually no serious scholarship had been undertaken to explain the difference between male and female lawbreaking (Heidensohn, 1968). Feminist empiricists pushed for the inclusion of women in research samples and guided research toward topics and issues of relevance for women. In what Chesney-Lind (1989: 84) referred to as the *'add women and stir approach,'* feminist empirical epistemology did not directly reject the positivist goals of traditional methods of social inquiry, but rather sought to critique the way research was practiced (Letherby, 2003).

As feminist theory developed, so too did its critique of feminist empiricism. Of most relevance to this project was the challenge that feminist empiricism focused on comparing the treatment of women in the justice system to that of men, thereby leaving men as the universal standard (Smart, 1990). This critique informed the development of my research questions to ensure they went beyond comparing women's experiences of desistance with those of men and instead focused on deconstructing some of the accepted desistance processes from an explicitly gendered perspective, thus emphasising the women's experiences as worthy of study in their own right. Critiques of feminist empiricism argued that we cannot disrupt knowledge production that has historically silenced and erased women using traditional, male defined epistemologies (Chesney-Lind, 1989). Smart (1990),



however, differentiates empiricism and 'empirical work' (p. 78) stating '*To engage with women, to interview them, to document their oral histories, to participate with them, does not automatically mean that one upholds the ideal of empiricism*' (Smart, 1990: 78-79). This research includes some positivist intentions in that it, to some extent, 'adds women and stirs' them into desistance theorising. The purpose of this, however, is to examine the androcentric assumptions within the desistance scholarship. As explained by Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007), these assumptions often escape notice until a category that has been excluded or overlooked is introduced. This research focuses on analysing women's trauma, the dynamics of violence against women, and the social subjugation of women in the context of their efforts to desist from crime. Therefore, I consciously sought an epistemology and methodology that was explicitly feminist.

#### 4.2.2. Feminist research promotes social justice.

Another principle of feminist research, and one later applied by Charmaz (2006/2014) to constructivist grounded theory is that research should seek to promote social justice and change that will benefit those women involved (Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013; Ramazanoglu, 2002). Feminist research has historically been associated with feminist activism, emerging as it did in the context of the civil rights and second wave feminist movements of the late 1960s/early 1970s (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007; Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013). Constructivist grounded theory's emphasis on empirical scrutiny and analytic precision fosters analyses of how social and economic conditions work in specific situations. Such analyses can inform practices and policies that social justice researchers seek to change (Charmaz 2006/2014)

My positionality as a former practitioner and current educator means this research was grounded in an awareness that the move towards desistance based approaches to practice in prisons and probation had not meaningfully accounted for the analyses of women's experiences of desistance. Therefore, an objective of the project was to develop knowledge that could inform desistance-based practice with women. This emanated from my commitment to ensuring the research would have some real world benefit to the women

represented by those who participated in the study as, for me, this was the only justification for asking them to share their knowledge and experiences. This consideration was integral to the design of the research questions, aims, and objectives. Therefore, in-keeping with this principle of feminist research, the project began with an explicit value position and an agenda for change (Charmaz 2004/2014).

#### 4.2.3. Feminist research takes a feminist standpoint

For this project, developing an understanding women's experiences of desistance that also accounted for their experiences of multi-faceted gendered adversity required a feminist standpoint. Feminist standpoint perspectives argue that feminist research must start with women's experiences (Maynard and Purvis, 1994; Renzetti, 2013). Harding (1995) suggests that the experiences and lives of marginalized people, as they understand them, provide the most significant agendas for the feminist research process as they are a way of uncovering traditionally subjugated knowledge (see also, Ramazanoglu 2002; Wuest, 1995). Women occupy different marginalised social locations in relation to male power that afford them particular knowledge. More recently, intersectional feminism and Black feminism have challenged standpoint feminism's tendency to present 'woman' as a unitary concept, thereby erasing the experiences of marginalised women (Chesney-Lind and Morash, 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Devault and Gross, 2012; Potter, 2013). Hill Collins (1990/2000) argues, for example, that to survive and flourish in an overwhelmingly white society, Black women must navigate the rules of a privileged white world that discriminates against them on the basis of social positions marginalised by intersecting racial, gender, and class discrimination.

The feminist standpoint approach and attention to intersectionality is evident, if not explicit, in several of the studies into women's desistance (for example, Barr, 2018; Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013; Österman, 2018), though few of the general desistance studies (with the exception of Giordano et al., 2002). Consequently, there is an emerging body of work on women's experiences of desistance that approach the topic from a feminist standpoint and to which it is hoped this research will contribute.

#### 4.2.4. Feminist research challenges the 'tyranny of methodolatry'

(Daly, 1977: 11)

The commitment to feminist standpointism, and later intersectionality, encouraged post-modern feminist researchers to incorporate elements traditionally considered to sully scientific research into the knowledge-building process, including interpretation, subjectivity, emotion, and embodiment (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007). Instead of viewing these aspects as contaminants or barriers to uncovering valid knowledge, feminist researchers explain how the specific experiences and situated perspectives of both researchers and respondents alike may become tools for knowledge building and rich understanding. In discarding positivist assumptions the ability to build knowledge is not lost, in fact, it is argued that human emotions, subjectivities, and unique lived experiences, should be embraced as ways of gaining new insights and understandings (Brooks and Hesse-Biber, 2007).

In large part, the knowledge that emerged from this research is emotional and embodied knowledge. The women's struggles to survive historic abuse, their ongoing experiences of victimisation, their involvement with the justice system, and the destruction of relationships and connections associated with all of these experiences mean that the knowledge they shared about their experiences of desistance was grounded in their emotional responses, though there has been little investigation into the role of emotions in the desistance process (Hunter and Farrall, 2017; Vaughan, 2007). The women's desistance journeys were characterised by emotions; fear, shame, distress, frustration, grief, determination, and hope were a few that were common to most women, but not all. Individual women experienced different combinations of emotions, they manifested in different ways, and were experienced with greater or lesser intensity resulting in different experiences of the desistance process.

The women's knowledge was also embodied. Many of their experiences were influenced by their gender and sex. Their bodies were repeatedly harmed, exploited, punished, and treated as *female* bodies. The women carried vulnerability, shame, stigma, and resilience relevant to the desistance process that was both gendered and sexed. Being alert to emotion,

embodiment, and subjective experience as sources of knowledge enabled fuller analysis of the ways in which the women's experiences of desistance were gendered.

Feminist epistemologies also encourage the deconstruction of hierarchical power in research relationships and strive for non-exploitative relationships that value the participant as co-investigator (DeVault and Gross, 2012). I developed strategies (discussed in detail later) to build this principle into all elements of the research design.

#### 4.2.5. Feminist research is undertaken by those who identify as feminist.

A principle of feminist epistemology underpinning this research is that the researcher identifies themselves as feminist (Reinharz, 1992). I would argue that this is the foundation on which the other principles rest.

Reinharz (2002) comments that self-identification avoids applying a singular definition of 'feminist' to all feminist researchers. Therefore, I offer a short statement on my feminist orientation. Feminism is the filter through which I see and exist in the world. Feminist activism is in my scholarship because it is in every facet of my life. My feminism was born from my work in the justice system, but feminist activism has since spread into all areas of my life. I teach undergraduates about women and crime and post-graduates about feminist methodologies. I trained and have volunteered as a counsellor, working with women who experienced domestic abuse. I am involved in organised feminist political action, on both local and national levels. I intentionally engage with feminist culture in terms of the books I read, the films and television I watch, the media I engage with, and the knowledge I absorb. The feminism I encounter with women in the justice system and survivors of abuse does not always sit comfortably with the more ideological feminism of the academic, political, and cultural spaces in which I participate, but I believe my feminism is enriched by the challenges they present to and the questions they raise of each other. All of which is to say that I view life through the lens of feminism, there is no way my research can be anything other than feminist.

Given the nature of this study, it was inevitable that it would involve extremely sensitive subject matter, including the participants' struggles with trauma, victimisation, offending behaviours, and social deprivation. Consequently, the methodology had to provide a safe, ethically robust foundation to the research that upheld the principles of feminist research outlined above (Moore and Wahidin, 2017). On researching different methodological approaches, I determined constructivist grounded theory to offer the best fit in terms of adhering to feminist principles and achieving the aims and objectives of the project.

#### 4.3. Constructivist grounded theory as feminist research methodology

Reinharz (1992) suggests that feminism supplies the perspectives, but individual disciplines supply the method (see also, Wuest, 1995). A primary function of the methodology in this study was to give a platform to the women to share their reflections and insights on desistance with as little external influence as possible. Ethically, my paramount concern in relation to gathering information was safety (Moore and Wahidin, 2017). Creating a 'safe space' within the prison environment would rely on the women and I building trust. Therefore, the research had to be *collaborative*. A second criteria was that the methodology is *inductive*. It was important to avoid defining women's experiences within the frame of existing theories on desistance, or from within my own understanding of the process (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). The methodology also had to facilitate analysis that does not rely on pre-defined hypotheses (Glaser and Strauss, 1968). That said, I am a researcher with significant knowledge and experience in the area of desistance. In order to use this knowledge as an advantage, I also needed a methodology that is *iterative*, that would allow a to-ing and fro-ing between participating, reflecting, and analysing (Charmaz, 2006/2014). The secondary research question of if and how women's experiences of desistance are gendered meant one way to use this prior knowledge to the advantage of the project was in enabling a *comparative* analysis.

Reflecting on the criteria from this vantage point, I would also suggest that these represent a trauma-informed approach to research. At the time of defining the criteria, I had limited knowledge of trauma-informed principles, but having developed this knowledge over six

years, it is apparent that the principles of trauma-informed practice apply to this study. I sought to build the research methodology on principles of trust, safety, collaboration, choice, and empowerment for the participants (Harris and Fallot, 2001; Bloom and Covington, 2008)

Constructivist grounded theory fit the above criteria. Put simply, grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data which is gathered and analysed in a methodical way (Glaser and Strauss, 1968; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). It is a systematic, inductive, comparative approach to conducting inquiry for the purpose of theory construction (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory method involves an iterative process of moving between the empirical data and emerging analysis to make the data progressively more focused and the analysis increasingly more theoretical (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007).

Clarke (2012) argues that grounded theory can be seen as constituting a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions, along with concrete practices, that are implicitly feminist. Grounded theory is rooted in symbolic interactionism. It was developed to search for meanings held by research participants and is committed to representing those in the study on their own terms. Grounded theory methods use Mead's understanding of all knowledge as perspective, emphasising positionality, context, and diversity (Charmaz 2006/2014). In-keeping with feminist standpoint perspectives, it actively seeks minority or marginalised views and subjugated knowledge in order to disrupt the representational hegemony that privileges some perspectives and erases others. It applies materialist social constructivism, in that in understanding ideological and symbolic concepts as socially constructed, it also understands the material world, including our own embodiment as socially constructed. Grounded theorists foreground deconstructive analysis and multiple, simultaneous readings of data (Charmaz 2006/2014).

Despite some of its implicit feminism, grounded theory has also been criticised for its lack of reflexivity and critical evaluation of the research process (Clarke, 2012; Kushner and Morrow, 2003; Oleson, 2007). Specifically in relation to principles of feminist research, grounded theory does not include a normative concern with the status of women (Kushner and Morrow, 2003). Reflecting its positivist origins, grounded theory originally failed to connect

individuals with their social contexts, lacked a concern with emotional experience, and failed to recognise the researcher's agency in data construction, interpretation, and in the framing of accounts (Oleson, 2007).

The ethical issues implied in these critiques were brought to my attention in the second phase of interviewing by Zoe. I completed and shared an 'interim report' (Petrillo, 2014) on my research findings with HMP Holloway and the women I was able to locate. Zoe challenged what she perceived as my stereotypical presentation of women in prison as drug dependent with mental health problems. Whilst I did not necessarily agree with this interpretation, her observations challenged me to reflect on whose stories I was prioritising and why, how I was presenting the women's accounts in the outputs from the research, and how these representations could be perceived by the women involved. I explained to Zoe that the vast majority of women centred experiences of drug use, victimisation, and mental illness in their offending and anticipated desistance. But beyond this justification, it made me rethink the focus of the research. If these experiences were so significant, they should be the explicit focus of the research and I needed to be open about this to the women involved.

[Zoe] also criticised my interim report. Not negatively, but questioned why it didn't include more comment from those women who did not fit the stereotype of drug user/mental health issues/ abused etc. It led to an interesting discussion. We identified that 'women like her' were managing to desist and could navigate all the obstacles once they were released. It was women with the stereotypical pathways to offending who found this more difficult. But her point was an important one as I don't want to parrot stereotypical depictions of women in this study. I want it to show their individualism and their strengths. The challenge, as I explained to A, is that I also want to show the extent and complexity of the problems women face that lead them to offend (reflective journal, 04/03/2015: appendix B)

However, it wasn't until later in the project that I started to make specific theoretical connections between trauma recovery and desistance, as illustrated in this excerpt from my reflective journal,

Initially, I envisaged it [this research] as an exploratory project with some broad recommendations for practice. But this work [studying shame and vulnerability] has made me think more about what shape these recommendations for practice might take. I am also potentially going to be involved in some evaluation of trauma-informed

work, so am thinking about how shame resilience fits with trauma-informed practice. So the recommendations for practice might end up being linked to trauma-informed work. That this is how to support desistance in women. Is it? (Reflective journal, 04/10/2017, appendix B)

It also prompted me to specifically identify and analyse the stories of the few women like Zoe<sup>6</sup> who did not identify drug use or mental illness as primary factors in either their offending or desistance; to include those experiences that were uncharacteristic of the majority (Allen, 2011).

Wuest (1995) suggests these limitations can be addressed by the researcher's attention to the usefulness of the generated knowledge, particularly for those involved, the use of non-oppressive research methods, reflexivity in the grounded theory research process, and integration of broader social, cultural, and political contexts, including gender influences, on women's lives (Wuest, 1995; Kushner and Morrow, 2003). Constructivist grounded theory is a contemporary version of grounded theory that adopts the methodological strategies such as coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling of the original method, but incorporates reflexivity, bringing the researcher's role and actions into view (Charmaz, 2006/2014). Thus, in-keeping with principles of feminist research, constructivist grounded theory aims for interpretation rather than generalisation, co-construction rather than discovery, and reflexivity rather than objectivity, making it particularly relevant for this research (Wuest 1995; Kushner and Morrow 2003).

Constructivist grounded theory fit with my criteria for a methodology, though I had concerns about the end goal being theory construction. Whilst I hoped to develop a theory of women's desistance, I could not be sure the data or my analysis would support this. Charmaz is reassuring on this point, explaining that many grounded theory projects stop short of constructing new theory, but that the method will still increase the analytic importance of the work (Charmaz, 2006/2014). Ultimately, what results from this research is not a new theory. Rather, it is a drawing together of desistance and trauma theories to provide a gender-

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<sup>6</sup> I defined these as women who did not report offending related to substance misuse and/or mental health problems as significant to their offending or desistance, even if these were aspects of their lives.



responsive understanding of women's experiences of desistance, and a trauma-informed framework for practice to support women's efforts to leave crime behind after prison.

## 4.4. Research methods

As this research involved analysis of personal and political decisions and influences in women's lives, it needed to respond to Smart's (2009) challenge to find ways to hear and represent the complex layers in the lives of women in the justice system. In common with other research projects that have adopted a feminist grounded theory methodology (for example, Allen, 2011, Charmaz, 1983 cited in Charmaz, 2006/2014) the methodology needed to be able to take account of the sensitivity of the issues involved, while remaining open to the possibility of diversity among the accounts of these experiences (Allen, 2011).

Feminist researchers emphasize the synergy and interlinkages between epistemology, methodology, and method and are interested in the different ways that a researcher's perspectives interacts with, and influence, how we go about collecting and analysing our data (Charmaz, 2006/2014; Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2007). This study adopts methods from constructivist grounded theory to gather, sort, synthesise, and analyse the data. This chapter will now examine the methods used in this research, highlighting ethical issues as they arose.

### 4.4.1 Recruitment of participants

My previous professional experience suggested that sustaining the women's participation in this project would rely on us building meaningful researcher-participant relationships.

Oakley's (1981) comments on her experience resonated and informed my approach throughout the data collection process. She said, *'repeated interviewing over this kind of period and involving intensely personal experiences...established a rationale of personal involvement I found it problematic and ultimately unhelpful to avoid'* (Oakley, 1981: 42).

The recruitment phase of the research was the foundation of establishing these relationships. Sustaining the women's engagement in intensive, and potentially repeated interviews meant the interviews had to feel positive and, ideally, useful to them. Building rapport when inviting

the women to participate felt crucial to the interview being successful (DeVault and Gross, 2012). I achieved this by approaching women in a friendly, relaxed manner, introducing myself, explaining about the project, providing them with a short leaflet written especially for participants. In these discussions I focused on the value of their knowledge, emphasised the goal of the research being about improving provision for women in prison, and explained how I intended to use the information. If they were interested in participating, I asked them to identify a convenient time, where they would like to meet, and explained how they could contact me should they need to before the session to give them as much control over the interview as possible.

#### 4.4.2. Data collection: In-depth interviewing

Feminist interviewing disrupts the traditional researcher/researched roles. Oakley (1981) warns against adopting an exploitative attitude to interviewees as a source of data and advocates a participatory model of interviewing. This involves sharing ideas and stories and is thought to *'increase reciprocity and rapport, thus breaking down notions of power and authority invested in the role of the researcher'* (Hesse-Biber, 2011: 123). Feminist approaches therefore dispel the notion of dispassionate objectivity and highly bounded interactions. They rely instead on the formulation of a reciprocal relationship to obtain the quality of information required (Noaks and Wincup, 2004; Oakley, 1981).

Constructivist grounded theory also emphasises breaking down the barriers between researcher/researched in order to form relationships, rebalance power, and gain understanding of the participants' perspectives. Charmaz (2006/2014) advocates the use of person-centred approaches in interviewing which emphasise authenticity, empathy, and unconditional positive regard (Charmaz 2006/2014; Rogers, 1959). I was trained in the use of these approaches as part of an Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy qualification<sup>7</sup>. This provided a strong, ethical position from which to enter into sensitive discussions (Moore and Wahidin, 2017). These approaches can be of significant value, as Charmaz (2006/2014) explains, *'Entering the participants' world of implicit meaning is a privilege in which you may*

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<sup>7</sup> Post-Graduate Certificate in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy awarded by University of East London in 2012.

*experience precious shared moments. Attending to them can infuse your nascent grounded theory with new analytic insights and increase its theoretical reach'* (p.98). These approaches allow the sharing and eliciting of the participants' definitions of terms, situations, and events. They also support what Charmaz (2006/2014) terms '*emergent reconstructions*,' (p.103) when participants reflect on experiences and gain new insights. Catherine provided an example of this when, during the course of discussions about past offending, she acknowledged that despite having no previous convictions, she has been a 'compulsive thief' in order to support members of her family.

...it's because I needed money to pay my brother's drugs or I needed money to give to my mum. So I always stole so that I could give my mum or I could give my brother or my sister or... I never bought anything for myself or had anything for myself; I always stole from a young age, even babysitting, I'd steal. I'd eat all the food there so I wouldn't have to go home and eat, so I could save my mum money. I'd steal a tin of tuna or I'd steal little things out of their cupboards so I could take it home so then there'd be food. I never told anyone that before; you're the first person I told (Catherine, initial interview).

I used a number of strategies to ensure the interviews adhered to principles of feminist and constructivist intensive interviewing. The interviews were unstructured. I had a basic interview schedule [Appendix D(iv)], but the women ultimately controlled the sessions and therefore if, how, and when topics were raised for discussion (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Oakley, 2015). I understood the importance of embedding the most sensitive issues in the heart of the interview. As the women directed the interviews, this happened organically in most cases. However, this was not always the case and it was in these instances that I had to draw on my professional experience to make the interviews feel safe. In this example, the first thing Alice said to me was that her offending resulted from having been raped.

Madeline: Yes, the purpose of this first meeting is to get an idea of how you've come to be in Holloway at this time in your life.

Alice: Well, I'll tell you. I was raped in January, and it's still under police investigation. They're still trying to catch the man that did it. I ended up taking drugs to try and alter my mood and stuff, trying to help me cope...

In order to respond appropriately to this so early in the discussion, I had to draw on all my knowledge and experience about interviewing and about violence against women. This raised issues both in terms of adherence to grounded theory methodology and in gaining ethical approval. Glaser and Strauss' (1968) original statement for undertaking grounded theory research encouraged researchers to enter the field as a blank slate, with as little knowledge as possible about the subject of the research. However, Charmaz (2006/2014) questions both the possibility and the value of this for most researchers and suggests that familiarity with the organisations and pertinent procedures can help engage the research participants and guide the conversations. As a former Probation Officer, I supervised many women after release from prison and, as such, was familiar with their experiences. It was this knowledge that prompted the initial questions that gave rise to this research. As a probation educator, I teach the theoretical underpinnings and the practical application of desistance-based approaches to rehabilitation. I was confident that my professional experience would be of benefit to this research, primarily in relation to gathering data through interviews. However, this posed a problem for the Research Ethics Committee (REC), which I reflected on at the time;

[The REC] questioned my ability to complete in depth interviews in the time frame to which I responded to that I was used to doing in-depth interviews expediently from interviewing for PSRs. I understood [The REC's] response to this to suggest that PSR interviews are not 'in-depth' interviews. I bristle at this because, whilst I know some PSR interviews are completed mechanically, I pride myself on never succumbing to this. I pride myself my ability to get to the crux of issues in a way that feels supportive and collaborative to the person, but does not require hours and hours of interviewing. Not only do I have my probation experience of this, but my counselling experience too. I feel confident about doing these interviews. There are things about this project I am not confident about, but I feel in a very good position to get the interviews right. I also really value my knowledge, skills, and experience from Probation and did not like to hear it being dismissed or assessed as potentially detrimental to the research. I do not believe it will be – but it is useful that it has been raised so that I can observe whether I am being too much of a 'Probation Officer.' That said, my approach to probation has always been person-centred. I was never a punitive, controlling, directive probation officer, so I am not likely to take on that approach now

(Reflective diary 16/05/2013: appendix B).

Procedural difficulties with ethics committees encountered by qualitative researchers have been noted (see for example, Israel and Gelsthorpe, 2017; Moore and Wahidin, 2017) and

have prompted the development of feminist ethics. These supplement attention to procedural matters with concern for the substance of the research, allegiance to the participants, and responsivity in disciplinary standards (DeVault and Gross, 2012).

Conducting the interviews safely had been my primary ethical concern for this project. Entering into discussions, such as that with Alice, without the professional knowledge and skills I had, would have felt unethical and would risk undermining the requirement to 'do no harm.' Without these skills, discussions such as those in this research can be traumatising for both the participant and the interviewer. The British Society of Criminology's (BSC) statement of ethics notes the researcher's responsibility to '*minimise personal harm to research participants by ensuring that the potential physical, psychological, discomfort or stress to individuals participating in research is minimised by participation in the research*' (BSC, 2018). The interviews involved discussing some extremely sensitive issues and my past experiences in both probation and domestic abuse counselling meant I was able manage these safely. It also enabled me to address the secondary research question of how the experiences were gendered. When topics that have been shown to be important to desistance generally were raised, I knew to examine these from a gendered perspective. For example, if the women spoke of the importance of getting a job, rather than accept that as both men and women identifying employment as important to desistance, I would follow this up by asking what having a job meant for them. For example, a gendered element to this turned out to be employment as a means of avoiding abusive or otherwise harmful relationships.

I was aware that the women would talk about emotionally distressing subjects so knew I needed a strategy to ensure they were not re-traumatised and would leave the interview feeling positive. I was conscious when undertaking the initial interviews in custody that the women would not be used to being able to remove themselves from the interview if they felt uncomfortable. In prison, the women have to wait to be dismissed from sessions and cannot move freely. Recognising I had complete control over the 'end' of the interview, I prepared to manage this carefully from the point when I invited the women to participate. I identified each participant's personal or wing officer and, with the consent of the woman, informed them about the session, asking them to look out for any signs of distress when they returned

to the wing. The final question I asked the women was always what they needed to support their desistance. This enabled the women to think positively about their futures. Throughout the interviews, I paid attention to and positively reinforced the strengths and resilience the women expressed and returned to these to validate their beliefs that things could change at the end of the sessions. I repeatedly showed appreciation for their participation. At the end of the session, I asked directly how the women had found the experience and explained where they could get additional support if they felt they needed to speak to someone, including offering them the opportunity to speak to me again. I checked on these strategies throughout the data gathering period. In the follow-up sessions, the women chose the location and time of the interviews and who attended.

Most of the sessions felt very positive and the women made comments to this effect. Several of the women commented that they had enjoyed the interviews, some said they were like a counselling session (meant positively!), as exemplified in Catherine's quote below, and some found them useful for other aspects of their rehabilitation [see Appendix E].

Thanks for letting me partake in the experience it was really good and your feedback really helpful to hear. I'd like to help in any way I can. If there's anything I can help with, please let me know. I look forward to our next meeting (Catherine, initial interview).

Another strategy I employed in the interviews to ensure they reflected feminist, constructivist principles was being alert to markers signifying how the participant is responding emotionally. I am trained in 'reflective listening.' This involves listening carefully and intently to what the participants want to tell you, as opposed to what you want to hear. It means listening not just to what is said, but how it's said; the tone, intensity, emotional inflections, pace, and volume, to catch precise meanings and ensure you respond appropriately (DeVault and Gross, 2012; Egan, 2001; Hesse-Biber, 2011). I reflected my observations back to the women to check I had an accurate understanding and to demonstrate I am actively listening to, and empathising with their narratives. This can be achieved simply through non-verbal forms of communication. For example, in several of the interviews, the women frequently fill with the phrase 'you know what I mean?' Feminists have identified this as not only a linguistic tick, but a request for validation. I respond in some way every time they say this

which conveys that I am still with them, that I understand what they are trying to express, and that I validate their experiences.

I was also conscious of how I asked questions. Some questions can be experienced as threatening and close the participant down (DeVault and Gross, 2012). For example, a question such as *Why do you keep coming back to prison?* is asking the person to talk about some very personal issues which are likely to be confusing and shameful for them and therefore difficult to articulate. However these questions can be reframed in a way invites explanation, as in this example from the session with Misha,

Madeline:      When you've gone out in the past, what's happened to you that's ultimately meant you've come back?

This phrasing removes blame from Misha and acknowledges the external structures and relationships that may be impacting on her efforts to sustain change. It also reflects the trauma-informed principle of starting from the question of *what happened* to someone as opposed to *what's wrong* with them.

Another useful strategy is paraphrasing, as in this example;

Misha:            ...once you've been to prison, you know your life is pretty much over....because you can't get a job, you can't educate...most colleges don't want you to go there...So you just know that your life is going to go...you can't earn money legitimately, so you're just going to commit more and more crime to be able to support yourself. So you know, that's just you life's ruined innit. That's how I feel.

Madeline:      That you're caught in this vicious circle?

In this example, I am picking up the meaning of Misha's words and putting it back to her using my own words, using a tentative questioning tone, checking I am understanding what is being said. This approach encouraged her to continue without me having to ask questions that could disrupt her narrative or insert my agenda into it.

Reflexivity comes into active use during interviews. Being aware of how I was reacting to what was being said could be used to help the women tell their stories. Staying with Misha's session, she was talking about first coming to prison and, in the middle of her narrative, I was shocked to hear her say she had always wanted to come to Holloway. Though she moved past this, when she paused I articulated this reaction;

Madeline:       It just struck me when you said you were little and you wanted to come to Holloway....

This then prompted Misha to talk about her relationship with her mother, which would turn out to be highly significant in both her offending and how she perceived her ability to desist. Responding in this way meant I did not ask direct questions about her relationship with her mother which may have felt more threatening, but invited her to talk about this should she want to.

These strategies encourage participants to feel genuinely listened to, which creates a safe space in which they can talk. This is useful for gathering rich data, but also means the session is likely to feel positive and of value to the participant. However, there are some criticisms of this approach. Feminist, constructivist approaches do not negate the potential for exploitation. Being too personal can provide a false illusion that there is no power differential, making participants more vulnerable as the researcher still has power to analyse and interpret participants' stories in way that renders them with little or no voice in this process (Stacey, 1991 cited in Hesse-Biber, 2012; Oakley, 2015). Constructivist grounded theory's analytical methods provided a means through which I could incorporate the women into the analytical process, and it is to these that I will now turn.

#### 4.4.3. Initial coding

Gelsthorpe (1992: 214) asserts that '*a focus on **experience in method** does not mean a rejection of the need to be critical, rigorous, and accurate*' (emphasis in original). A strength of constructivist grounded theory methodology is the clarity it provides for analytical praxis. Constructivist grounded theory provides strategies to incorporate criticality, rigour, and



accuracy into feminist, qualitative research praxis through its processes of initial, focused, and thematic coding (Charmaz 2006/2014).

This research involved a total of seventy-seven interviews and spanned a two year period between 2013-2015. Coding is the mechanism through which hundreds of pages of interviews, reflective notes, prior research, and other texts can be interrogated, sorted, and synthesized in order to define what is happening in the data and direct further data gathering (Charmaz 2006/2014). Different iterations of grounded theory recommend different phases of coding, however Charmaz' recommendations related to constructive grounded theory suited the aims of this research and therefore guided my coding practice.

Charmaz (2006/2014) explains that there are at least two main phases of coding, initial and focused coding. The initial phase involves naming each word, line, or segment of data to unearth analytic ideas to pursue in further data collection and analysis. I completed the first phase of pre-release interviews<sup>8</sup> between August-October 2013. I complete additional initial interviews between December 2013 and January 2014. The interviews were professionally transcribed and I began initial coding in September 2013. I undertook line-by-line or segment coding of all the interviews using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Coding in this way has important benefits to constructing grounded theory. Line-by-line coding provides an early corrective that reduces the likelihood of the researcher merely superimposing their preconceptions onto the data. There is a constant to-ing and fro-ing between the data and the codes which encourages researchers to examine unconscious assumptions in our interpretations and definitions (Charmaz 2006/2014). Fracturing the data forces the researcher to think about the data in new ways that may differ from the participants' interpretations, for example in identifying links between their actions and larger social processes or prior research, that take the emerging themes beyond the immediate research setting (Charmaz 2006/2014).

Initial coding should stick closely to the data and should be open-ended. Researcher positionality is important here too. Dey (1999: 251) asserts '*there is a difference between an*

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<sup>8</sup> Denoted as 'initial interviews' in the data chapters.

*open mind and an empty head.*' This is a plea for researchers to learn and examine how our positionality influences the way we see the world and, therefore, our data. Coding is a subjective process. My codes represent my interpretations of the narratives. I defined what I saw as significant and what I thought was happening in the data (Charmaz 2006/2014). Constructivist grounded theory encourages the practice of writing memos to actively reflect on coding. I found this detached the reflection from the analysis therefore used NVivo's 'annotation' facility to reflect on my codes and the coding process. I was able to explore the appropriateness of my initial coding through the subsequent process of theoretical sampling (detailed in chapter five).

#### 4.4.5. Focused coding

Charmaz (2006/2014) describes focused coding as a further phase of coding that involves assessing initial codes and comparing them with data and prior research to distinguish those that have greater analytic power. I added my reflections on the interviews into this process as it was in these reflections that I made initial analytic links between the data, existing knowledge on desistance, and later trauma [appendix B]. In this project, whilst I took the frequency with which codes occurred into consideration, the primary determining factor was the perceived significance of the code (Charmaz 2006/2014). I made decisions on the significance of codes based on the themes that revealed gaps in the existing desistance literature, had particular gendered elements to them, and/or those themes within which there was variation between the pre and post-release sessions.

Focused coding means generating more abstract categorisations that explain a number of earlier codes and sufficiently describe what those codes represent. My process for this was to condense initial codes into new category nodes comprising related sub-themes, or 'child nodes.' Once I had defined a category, I also explored and coded literature according to these nodes. In this way, the analysis of the data informed the analysis of the literature rather than vice versa. It was at this stage of the process that I noted the significance of trauma and trauma recovery as a potentially useful theoretical perspective from which to examine the

women's experiences of desistance. This subsequently informed the final phase of coding [Appendices C(i-iii)].

#### 4.4.6. Theoretical coding

The final phase of coding for this project was theoretical coding. This process is intended to help the researcher theorise the data and focused codes.

My reflections during focused coding of both the initial interviews and follow-up sessions kept returning to the relevance of the women's past experiences of victimisation and trauma, but I was struggling to make sense of how these interacted with sustaining desistance. I had prior knowledge of feminist criminological perspectives that question gendered justice frameworks. These perspectives highlight the paternalistic potential for such discourses to pathologise women's offending, over intervene in women's lives, and deny women agency, fixing them instead in an unhelpful 'victim' role (see for example, Carlton and Segrave, 2013; Evans, 2018). In order to better understand what I was identifying in the data, I began researching trauma-informed practice. This research helped me understand how acknowledging women's victimisation experiences can be used, and experienced, positively.

There was no published research on these approaches with women in the justice system in England and Wales at the time, but research from the USA (for example, Messina, Calhoun and Braithwaite, 2014; Saxena, Messina and Grella, 2014; Saxena, Grella, and Messina, 2015) was encouraging about the impact of these approaches on supporting women in the justice system. In order to determine whether trauma-informed practice may be usefully integrated into work supporting women's desistance, I needed to fully understand its principles, theoretical underpinnings, and modes of treatment delivery, so completed two training days in 2016; one on making organisations trauma-informed and one on *Healing Trauma*, a brief, gender-responsive, trauma informed intervention being delivered in women's prisons (Covington and Russo, 2016). This led to me undertaking a separate research project during 2018 and culminated in me completing the first UK evaluation of *Healing Trauma* (Petrillo, Thomas and Hanspal, 2019). Through this research, I had consultations with Dr. Stephanie

Covington, who developed the initiative and interventions, and One Small Thing, the charity responsible for the implementation of trauma-informed approaches across the female estate in England<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, my knowledge and understanding of trauma theory and trauma-informed approaches developed alongside the theory building phase of this research.

As a result of three key processes, I started to make analytical links between trauma recovery and desistance; firstly, my reflections on the interviews and early coding, secondly the three-stage coding process supported by theoretical sampling and repeatedly returning the field, and thirdly increasing my knowledge of the impacts of trauma and trauma-informed practice. This resulted in my analysis of women's experiences of desistance consolidating around the interplay between existing desistance theories, feminist perspectives, and trauma-informed approaches. From this, I identified the theoretical categories of relationships, restoration, responsibility, and recovery as explanatory themes for integrating trauma and desistance theories to further understandings of women's experiences of desistance and the development of gender-responsive frameworks of support for women.

## 4.5. Conclusion

This chapter reflects on my application of feminist approaches in this research with the intentions of safely exploring the women's experiences and ideas, and being able to amplify their voices in this study. The focus of the study means the experiences that come to the fore are centred on victimisation and trauma. This risks 'silencing' aspects of the women, their experiences, and their interactions with me in this research process that reveal their optimism, humour, and resilience. This is something I reflected on early in the research process,

Had a very uplifting interview today with ET. Again, a hugely resilient woman. Determined and focused from a young age. What stood out about ET was her humour. It felt like we spent the whole hour laughing – despite the difficulty she had experienced that resulted in her imprisonment and some uncertainty that awaits her on release. I keep smiling just thinking about her (Reflective journal: 22/08/2013, appendix B)

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<sup>9</sup> The 'Becoming Trauma Informed' initiative and trauma-informed interventions also started to roll out across the male long-term, high secure estate in England and Wales in June 2019. <https://onesmallthing.org.uk/>

This chapter explains how the research design and analytical approach came to centre the women's experiences of victimisation and trauma in their efforts to sustain desistance, but it is important to note that this does not represent the entirety of who the women are or what they have experienced.

Oakley (2000: 21) comments on the value of different '*ways of knowing*;' that research methods should be driven by the research question rather ideological affiliations to qualitative or quantitative approaches. The analysis in the thematic chapters of this thesis is qualitative. However, the next chapter draws on quantitative methods to provide some descriptive data and frequency-level analysis which serves as an overview of the women's demographic characteristics, offending, and trauma histories, and their correlations with their progress towards desistance.

## 5. An analysis of the women's demographic characteristics, offending, and trauma histories, and their correlations with their progress towards desistance.

During the course of the initial interviews, data on the participants' personal and social characteristics, offending and incarceration histories, and certain life experiences were recorded to enable analysis of correlations between these factors and the women's progress towards desistance [Appendix A(i)]<sup>10</sup>. Data on the women's index offences, sentence lengths, previous offending, and previous custody were collected [Appendix A(ii)], as it was envisaged that these data would enable analyses of the women's desistance processes in relation to their offending histories and experiences of the criminal justice system. Participant demographic characteristics included for analysis were age, ethnicity, employment, accommodation, and whether the participants had children [Appendix A(iii)]. These were selected on the basis either that they are factors that have been shown to be consistently correlated with the desistance process (Farrall et al., 2014) and/or because analysis of the initial sessions indicated the women perceived them as significant to *their* desistance processes. The final set of data collected were determined from initial coding of the initial interview sessions and refer to life experiences the women spoke of as having contributed to their offending and their expectations of change on release. These were drug use, alcohol use, mental health problems, relationships [Appendix A(iv)], experiences of childhood abuse, experiences of domestic abuse, experiences of other trauma [Appendix A(v)].

The parameters of this research aimed to stretch beyond an analysis of whether the factors that have been shown to influence (male) desistance are relevant to women's experiences. That said, failure to examine the narratives of the women in this study with reference to established knowledge around factors that contribute to desistance would limit its potential as a gendered analysis of desistance. This chapter therefore explores the demographic

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<sup>10</sup> Full data tables referred to in this chapter are provided, see Appendices A(i-v).

characteristics, offending-related needs, and life experiences of the women to identify any correlations between the presence and prevalence of these factors and desistance.

## 5.1. An open invitation to participate

Previous desistance studies have engaged in significant debate about appropriate groups with whom to examine desistance. Some compare 'persisters' and 'desisters' (for example, Maruna, 2001), others consider the early stages of desistance (for example, Healy, 2010), or those identified as having desisted by virtue of not having offended for a given period of time. There has been similar debate about the extent of offending that constitutes a 'criminal career' from which one can be determined to have desisted (Farrall et al., 2014). On the basis of these discussions, and a commitment to the research being directed by the women on whom it would impact, I decided not to exclude any woman from the project who wanted to be involved. Part of the purpose of this project was to examine experiences of both women who successfully sustained desistance after prison and those who did not. I decided there was value in exploring attempts to desist in a range of different circumstances. My only criteria for inclusion was that the women were close enough to release to allow for follow-up sessions within the timeframe of the project.

I invited women to participate by locating myself in the 'Reducing Reoffending' Unit. This unit comprised housing officers, a Department of Work and Pensions representative, and was where women attended offending behaviour programmes, Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings, and religious groups. Therefore, most of the women attending the reducing reoffending unit were due for release. Any woman I approached to participate who was within six months of release could participate. This constituted *convenience sampling* (Bryman, 2004: 100). As more women participated in the project, they, and some Prison Officers, would suggest others who might like to be involved. Therefore, as the project progressed, the convenience sampling continued alongside some *snowball sampling* (Bryman, 2004: 100). The same approach was used in the second phase of initial interviews. The first and second follow-up sessions and the third phase of initial interviews used *theoretical sampling* (Charmaz 2006/2014: 192-212) as the goal was to revisit some of the

themes from the initial sessions with women who were successfully desisting or had been returned to custody.

## Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling is a type of grounded theory sampling that enables the researcher seek participants to support defining the properties, boundaries, and relevance of a given theme (Charmaz 2006/2014). One year into the project I completed an interim report for HMP Holloway outlining the emergent findings from the study (Petrillo, 2014). These were presented as factors women anticipated would be important to their efforts to desist and represented the early categorisations of the codes from the first phase of initial interviews. I engaged in theoretical sampling by returning to HMP Holloway during 2014-15 to undertake additional initial interviews that would validate or add to my initial categorisations.

*Table 5.1: Interview phases*

	Initial interviews: pre-release			Follow-up 1 (FU1): post-release	Follow-up 2 (FU2): post-release
	06/08/2013- 09/01/2014	05/03/2014 – 05/10/2014	09/03/2015 – 02/05/2015	19/02/2014 – 11/11/2014	07/10/2014 – 17/05/2015
Number of interviews completed	34	17	5	10	11

The sample of follow-up interviews in this study is small. In total, I was only able to follow-up with thirteen of the original fifty-six women. However, a small number of in-depth follow-up interviews for the purpose of investigating specific themes is not unusual in either constructivist grounded theory or desistance research (for example, Healy, 2013). An additional strength of this sample is that it included almost equal numbers of women who were desisting or had been returned to custody and included women with a range of different demographic characteristics and offending-related needs.



Ten women participated in first wave of follow-up sessions and eleven in the second. In total, 23% of the original cohort were involved in either one or both of the follow-up sessions. At the first wave, Rina had been sentenced to an additional two years which meant she would be in prison beyond the end of the research. Jane participated in the first follow up session, but did not respond to invitations for a second follow-up. Frankie, Carla, and Dawn were located for the second wave of follow-up sessions, but had not been contactable for the first follow-up sessions.

*Table 5.2: Participation in follow-up interviews*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Follow-up 1 (FU1)</b>	<b>Follow-up 2 (FU2)</b>
Amy	✓	✓
Carla		✓
Catherine	✓	✓
Dawn		✓
Frankie		✓
Jane	✓	
Janine	✓	✓
Lynne	✓	✓
Michaela	✓	✓
Miriam	✓	✓
Rina	✓	
Victoria	✓	✓
Zoe	✓	✓

The process of theoretical sampling meant there were elements of co-constructed knowledge in this research. Theoretical sampling provided the opportunity to discuss emerging ideas and themes with a selection of the women involved in the study. These follow-up sessions allowed us to revisit the themes from the initial interviews. The findings and discussion in each of the themes represent an integration of my knowledge with that of the research participants. However, there were barriers to achieving fully co-produced research in this project. The most formidable of these was the challenge of re-establishing contact with the women once they left HMP Holloway, made more difficult by the closure of the prison during this project. These challenges are reflected in the small number of follow-

up session we were able to complete. The focus of the follow-up sessions was on how the women were experiencing efforts to desist since release or the obstacles they had encountered that had resulted in them returning to prison. I was mindful of limiting my impact on what the women chose to talk about so when they raised themes that were being identified as significant, I did discuss my understandings of these with them, but did not introduce these into discussions. It was only after the data gathering was complete that I started to focus on the links between trauma and desistance. At this point, whilst it would have been useful to discuss these with some of the women involved, I was mindful of not asking too much of them for this project. I had set out the scope and boundaries of the project and their participation clearly at the start and felt it was important to adhere to these. Whilst the methodology falls short of truly co-constructed analysis, it did enable me to discuss my interpretation of the initial sessions with the participants from a distance that enabled them to reflect on their ideas in light of subsequent experiences. These discussions supported the second phase of coding.

## 5.2. Fifty-six women

At the time of this research, HMP Holloway was the largest women's prison in the UK. It held a complex mix of prisoners, from those on remand to women serving life sentences. Its main catchment area was London and its population reflected the diversity of the capital city, with a large number of foreign national and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women, as well as those with mental health issues and substance dependency problems (HMIP, 2016a). Understanding the extent to which the participants in this research are representative of women in HMP Holloway and the criminal justice generally can help assess the relevance of their experiences to understanding women's desistance more generally.

Desistance studies have taken different approaches to defining the key variables of 'desistance' or 'persistence.' They rely variously on self-reported desistance (for example, Bottoms and Shapland, 2011; Graham and Bowling, 1998), self-report and officially recorded data (for example, Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 1993), or no recorded convictions after a certain age (for example, Farrington and West, 1990). In this

study, the women were identified as desisting if they were not returned to custody during the period of the research.

The trajectories of the women on leaving prison did not fit neatly into a desisting-persisting dichotomy. Categorisation of the participants' experiences post-release seemed more suited to a continuum (Nugent and Schnikel, 2016). Some had managed to leave offending and related lifestyles at the prison gates and had re-integrated into society in every sense of the word. Frankie is a good example. Whilst Frankie had no previous convictions when we first met, she had committed multiple offences of fraud over a period of almost a year. On release, she moved back in with her mother, gave herself a 'weekend off' then set to work finding employment. She secured a stable job with good prospects within a few weeks. With others, the follow-up interviews were undertaken back in HMP Holloway as a result of new custodial sentences. As an example, when I caught up with Janine for the second follow-up session, she was back in custody having been sentenced to eight years. Others were somewhere in between, in the 'liminal' space between desisting and persisting (Healy, 2010). Michaela and Lynne, were re-engaging with some offending related behaviours, but had not committed further offences. Miriam had engaged in both offending and drug use, but both at a much lower level than before, and she had not been reconvicted.

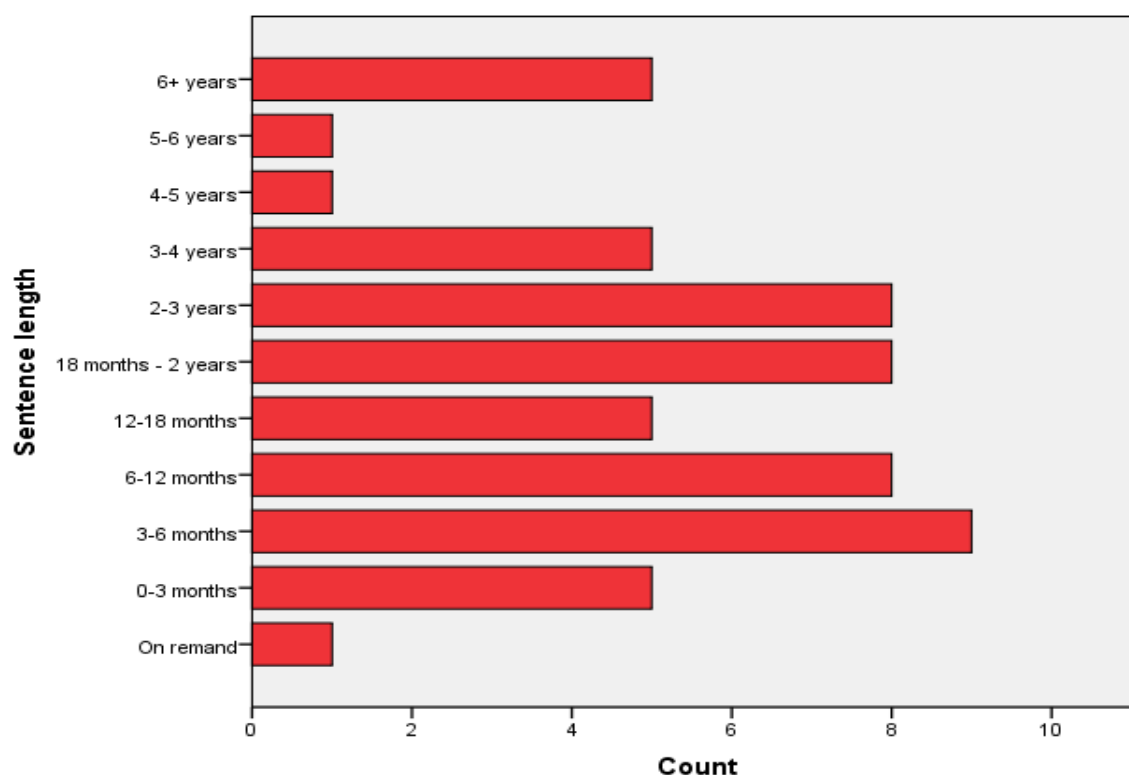
The 'return to custody' data was collected on 26 May 2016. Thirty-two women (57.1%) in this project were returned to custody at some point following their release and twenty-four (42.9%) were not. I was able to confirm from liaison with HMP Holloway and probation services that twenty-seven of the thirty-two women who were returned to custody were re-imprisoned as a result of either reconviction or recall for alleged new offending. These data reflect the official recidivism rates for women released between April and June 2016, 56.1% of whom reoffended (Office for National Statistics, 2018: 6). They suggest this cohort of women are broadly representative in terms of reoffending rates of women leaving prison.

At the first follow-up phase, eight of the ten women were in the community and two were back in HMP Holloway. At the second follow-up phase, six women were in the community and five back in custody. Of these five, two (Amy and Janine) had been returned to prison between the first and second follow-up interviews.

For those who were not returned to custody, their pathways to desistance remained highly personal. Whilst some such as Zoe, Miriam, Catherine, and Frankie experienced progressively more stability in their circumstances, others including Lynne and Michaela faced repeated battles with drugs, alcohol, and mental health lapses. Regardless of the circumstances to which they were released, all experienced emotional and practical challenges in the transition from prison to the community. These will be analysed in detail in the subsequent thematic chapters.

### 5.3. Offending behaviour and criminal histories

Among the female prison population in general, 76% of those imprisoned are sentenced to less than twelve months (Ministry of Justice, 2016). The 'average custodial sentence length' (ACSL) for women in 2015 was 9.5 months (Ministry of Justice, 2018b). 41.1% of the women in this research were serving a sentence of 12 months or under.



*Figure 5.1: Participants' sentence lengths*

Reoffending rates among women serving short prison sentences, defined as those under twelve months (Ministry of Justice, 2018b), are significantly higher than those for the women's prison population generally at 61% compared with 48% (Ministry of Justice, 2018b: 106). The reoffending rates from HMP Holloway were slightly lower. Of those serving less than twelve months, 50.5% reoffended (Cain and Clark, 2015<sup>11</sup>).

<sup>11</sup> This data is proven reoffending rates amongst those released from HMP Holloway in 2012-2013. This is the latest data available owing to the closure of HMP Holloway in 2016.

Table 5.3: Participants returned to custody by sentence length

		Returned to custody		
			% within Returned to custody	% within Sentence length
Sentence length		Count		
	On remand	1	3.1%	100.0%
	0-3 months	5	15.6%	100.0%
	3-6 months	6	18.8%	66.7%
	6-12 months	5	15.6%	62.5%
	12-18 months	1	3.1%	20.0%
	18 months - 2 years	5	15.6%	62.5%
	2-3 years	4	12.5%	50.0%
	3-4 years	5	15.6%	100.0%
	4-5 years	0	0.0%	0.0%
	5-6 years	0	0.0%	0.0%
	6+ years	0	0.0%	0.0%

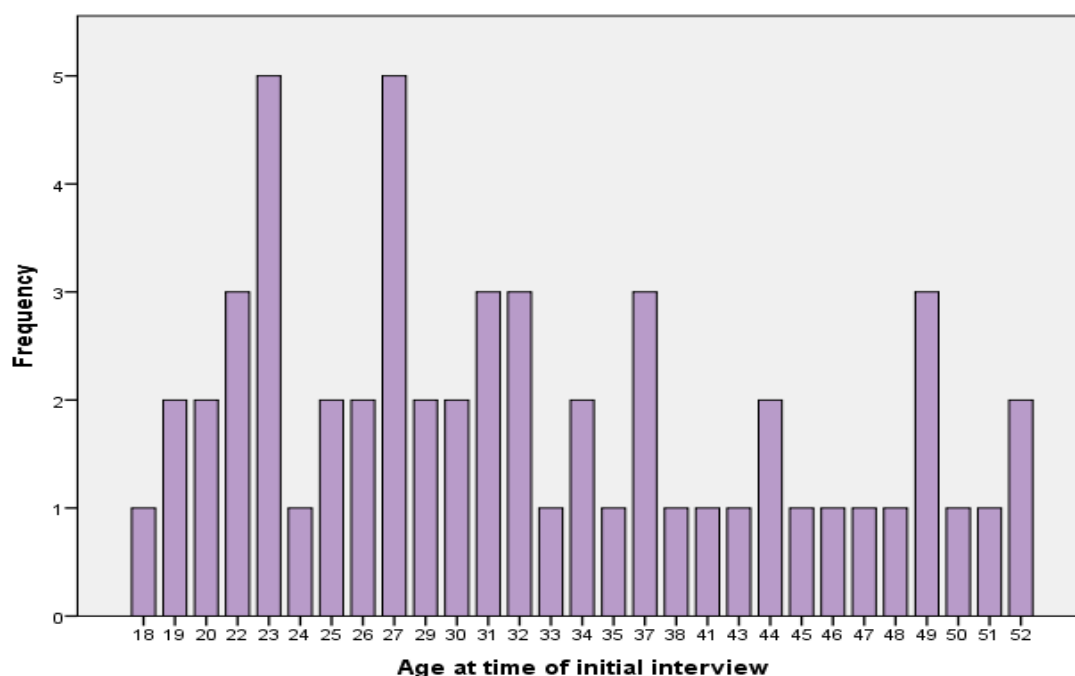
Table 5.3 reveals the rates of women returned to custody after release among this cohort closely corresponds to the reoffending rates for women released from HMP Holloway detailed above. 50% of those returned to custody were serving sentences of less than twelve months with the highest 'return to custody' rate being for those women who served 3-6 months. It is of note that no woman who served over four years was returned to custody during the follow-up period. This corresponds with Ministry of Justice data on reoffending among the female prison population generally that found few women serving more than four years are reconvicted (Ministry of Justice, 2018b: 106). Therefore, although this sample of women is small, the correlations between the sentences they served and their patterns of reoffending are fairly consistent with findings from research with women in the criminal justice system more generally. They add to the evidence indicating that of all disposals available in response to women's crime, short custodial sentences have the worst outcomes in relation to desistance from crime (Baldry, 2010).

## 5.3. Demographic characteristics and socio-economic circumstances

The following analysis considers associations between demographic factors and socio-economic circumstances that have been shown to be significant to desistance. It examines data on the women's age, race/ethnicity, housing, and employment against their progress with desistance.

### 5.3.1 Age

Desistance theories developed from the recognition that the vast majority of people grow out of crime. Age is considered the variable that most accurately predicts desistance (for example, Sampson and Laub, 1993; Moffatt, 1993). In order to understand different processes of desistance for women at different stages of the life course, it was important that the participants reflected the different stages of maturation among the female prison population.



*Figure 5.2: Age breakdown of the participants*

The ages of the participants ranged from the eighteen to fifty-two years old. The average age of the cohort was thirty-three. This corresponds with the average age range for women

in HMP Holloway in 2015 which was 30-39 (HMIP, 2016). 11.2% of the women in this study were classed as 'young offenders' (18-21), this is almost double the average of 6% young offenders in HMP Holloway during 2015 (Independent Monitoring Board, 2015).<sup>12</sup> 7.1% of the participants were aged fifty or over which is close to the average of 8% of women in HMP Holloway who were aged fifty or over in 2015 (Independent Monitoring Board, 2015).

*Table 5.4: Percentage of age group returned to custody*

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Percentage of age group returned to custody</b>
18-20	80.0%
21-25	54.5%
26-30	63.6%
31-35	50.0%
36-40	50.0%
41-45	60.0%
46-50	71.4%

Whilst the small number of participants in this study limits the conclusions that can be drawn from this data, it does reveal basic patterns that correspond to previous research on ageing, offending, and desistance among women. Women under thirty were most likely to be returned to custody during the period of this research. Interestingly, women in the 46-50 year-old group were the second most likely to be returned to custody. This conflicts with theories on maturation and the corresponding increase in informal social control have been advanced to explain desistance among women of child-bearing and rearing age. It is argued that this impacts women's involvement in crime as they have less free time and therefore less opportunity to engage in crime or criminogenic behaviours (Graham and Bowling, 1996).

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<sup>12</sup> This is latest available data on the demographic characteristics of the population in HMP Holloway as the establishment closed in 2016.



Kerrison, Bachman and Paternoster's (2016) research also concluded that as they age, women become increasingly fatigued with the criminal lifestyle. The lack of stability, the risks involved in committing crime, the revolving door of prison, the toll the lifestyle takes on their families, and the impacts on their physical and emotional health mean that changing their behaviour, despite the huge challenges this implies, starts to feel like an easier prospect than continuing their involvement in crime (Kerrison et al., 2016).

## 5.4. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women

The desistance literature has paid scant attention to ethnicity (Robinson and Hamilton, 2016; Calverley, 2011). Criminology and criminal justice generally are guilty of the erasure of BAME women's experiences (Potter, 2013). For this reason, I deliberately approached women of colour and invited them to participate in the research with the intention of there being sufficient ethnic diversity in the cohort to support analysis of the experiences of BAME women (see table 5.5).

HMP Holloway was the most ethnically diverse women's jail in England. BAME women make up 18% of the female prison population generally (Prison Reform Trust, 2017) but represented 56.3% of those held in HMP Holloway in 2015 (HMIP, 2016)<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> This figure includes all women identified as Irish, Gypsy/Irish Traveller and White Other as well as those identified as Black/Black British, Asian/Asian British, mixed/multiple ethnicity and other ethnic group.

**Table 5.5: Self-defined ethnicity of research cohort and of the population of HMP Holloway**

	Research cohort		HMP Holloway population
	Number	Percent	Percent
White British	28	50.0	44.7
Black British	20	35.7	24.2
Mixed Ethnicity	3	5.4	6.5
White - other European	3	5.4	16.6
Asian British	2	3.6	5.0
Other	0	0	2.7
Not stated	0	0	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The racial and ethnic diversity of the women in this sample broadly reflects that of women in HMP Holloway at the time, with the exception of those identifying as 'White – Other European' and 'Other' (HMIP, 2016a). The most likely explanation for this is that the only women who it is was not possible to include in this study were those without legal status in the UK, who were likely to face deportation on completion of their sentences, and those who could not speak English.

*Table 5.6: Returned to custody data by self-defined ethnicity*

Self-defined ethnicity	Returned to custody		Percent within return to custody group
	Yes	No	
White British	17	11	53.1%
Black British	10	10	31.3%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnicity	2	1	6.3%
Asian British	1	1	3.1%
White - other European	2	1	6.3%

It is a limitation of this research that the associations between ethnicity and desistance are restricted to a frequency level analysis. In conducting the qualitative interviews, I did not specifically ask BAME women to consider experiences of racial discrimination and how these

may impact on their pathways into and out of crime. Notwithstanding the consciousness with which I approached the inclusion of BAME women, in common with many white feminist researchers, in seeking a gendered understanding of desistance I left the role of race unexplored (Crenshaw, 1989; Potter, 2013). In order to minimise my impact on what the women chose to identify as relevant to their desistance, I decided not to introduce any topic into discussion that the women did not raise spontaneously. However, BAME women in particular have been shown to experience racial discrimination at all stages of the criminal justice process (Chigwada-Bailey, 2002). Black women are more likely to be arrested and charged. When they go to court they are more likely to be sentenced to custody and serve longer sentences (Chigwada-Bailey 2002; Lammy, 2017). They are more likely to have their behaviour interpreted negatively (Chigwada-Bailey, 2002). This knowledge provides sufficient rationale to justifiably introduce experiences of discrimination into the discussion. Failing to do so meant relying on the women to both recognise and articulate their experiences of structural discrimination which, although well-evidenced, are often little understood, either by those contributing to or those on the receiving end of structural racism (for examples, MacPherson 1999; Ministry of Justice 2016; Lammy, 2017). Until racism is fully accepted as a contributor to criminalisation, it is incumbent upon criminological research to illuminate the role racism plays in all aspects of criminal justice, to make those important links between personal experiences and structural norms (Charmaz, 2006/2014). The potential to enhance understanding of the role experiences of racism play in women's pathways into an out of crime through their stories is illustrated here by Rina. She raised her mixed-race ethnicity spontaneously as a factor in her pathway to offending.

I left home at nine, been a troubled child I'd say. I'm mixed race heritage, mother's Black Jamaican, dad's White English. I think that I had trouble dealing with the racist issues growing up as a child. My mum being Jamaican, I was grown up in a Black environment. My dad's never really...it's never been a marriage family, it was separate. I grew up in a very anti-whites environment in a strange way, so I was the only mixed race child in the family. So I suffered a bit of racism, but it wasn't direct. It was just the way they'd been brought up,...just natural for them, you know, how they were, but I felt it quite hard to deal with being mixed race. So I was quite a troubled child, started running away at nine, mixing with older people – I was a developed child, very, well, womanly at a young age, so it was easy for me to fit into older groups. I started dabbling with gas at a young age, then started smoking cannabis and started taking crack at about ten, nine/ten. (Rina, initial interview).

In Rina's account of her experiences of what she defines as racism, it is clear she perceives discrimination to be related to behaviours that later led to crime. She relates experiences of isolation found in accounts of those of mixed/multiple ethnicity who are neither white enough to benefit from the privileges of the dominant racial group or Black enough to be accepted by minority ethnic groups (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Rina's account indicates the intersections of gender and race should be important sites for analysis in attempting to understand women's processes of desistance. Intersectional discrimination impacts on almost every factor identified as significant to desistance including relationships, identity, agency, and opportunities for social inclusion (Chigwada-Bailey, 2002; Hall et al., 2017; Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013; Potter, 2013).

## 5.5. Socio-economic factors

Having examined the demographic characteristics of the women involved in the research, the next stage of analysis examines correlations between socio-economic factors and the women being returned to custody. The findings here will focus on the prevalence and any correlations between employment, housing, and motherhood and the women's progress towards desistance.

### 5.5.1. Employment

Thirty-five (62.5%) of the women reported never having been employed. Although this cannot tell us whether the women found employment on release, none of these women had employment arranged for their release. Of the women involved in the follow-up sessions, only two were in employment and one in full-time education by the time the data collection was complete. These three were all in the desisting group. Of those in the follow-up group who were returned to custody, none had obtained employment after release.

Among the whole cohort, of those returned to custody, 75% had never held employment. Only marginally more of those in the desisting group had any experience of employment than had none (54% compared to 46%). For women in this study, never having been

employed is correlated with continued offending. However, having been employed is only marginally correlated with no return to custody because so many women had little or no experience of employment, reflecting women's continued economic marginalisation and gendered workforce segregation.

### 5.5.2. Accommodation

Corston (2007) commented that housing is probably the most significant resettlement need for women leaving custody, yet it is reported that around 60% may have no accommodation on release (Prison Reform Trust, 2018). Of the thirty-two women returned to custody, fourteen (43.8%) had been in stable accommodation<sup>14</sup> prior to their incarceration and expected to return to stable accommodation on release. Sixteen (50%) were in temporary accommodation<sup>15</sup> and were uncertain about where they would be living on release. Two women (6.3%) were street homeless. At the first follow-up, all except Janine had some form of accommodation. At the second follow-up, all the desisting group were in stable accommodation. This included supported hostels, independent accommodation, or their family homes. Of those returned to custody, Amy, Carla, Dawn, and Janine specifically cited problems with housing as significant in their reoffending.

As with other data, the small sample means that the data can only really reveal patterns for this cohort but they show that, among this group, those most likely to be returned to custody following release were those who had been in temporary accommodation prior to imprisonment. It also reveals among the full cohort that having accommodation is not a strong predictor of desistance, as almost half of those in stable accommodation were returned to custody.

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<sup>14</sup> Family home, owned/private rented accommodation, or social housing.

<sup>15</sup> Including temporarily staying with friends/family, hostel accommodation, women's refuges, and 'sofa surfing.'

### 5.5.3. Motherhood

Around 61% of women in prison are mothers (Caddle and Crisp, 1997) and it is estimated that around 17,240 children are impacted by maternal imprisonment each year (Prison Reform Trust, 2018). Thirty-two (57%) of the women in this study are mothers. As is presented in Table 5.7 among this cohort, there is no strong correlation between motherhood and desistance. Prior desistance studies have arrived at contradictory conclusions on whether motherhood is a significant factor in women's desistance (see chapter two).

*Table 5.7: Returned to custody data by motherhood status*

	Is a mother		Total
	No	Yes	
Returned to custody Yes	14	18	32
No	9	15	24
Total	23	33	56

## 5.6. Criminogenic factors

Criminogenic factors refer to aspects of the women's lives or experiences that they spoke of as being related to their offending and/or their perceived ability to desist from offending on release. These extra-legal factors are substance use and mental health issues. The findings here will focus on the prevalence of and any correlations between these factors and the women's progress towards desistance. In-depth analysis of how they were experienced in the process of desistance will be examined in subsequent chapters.

### 5.6.1. Substance dependency

Women are more likely than men to report problems with drugs and alcohol on arrival into custody (HMIP, 2018). Alcohol and drug use was coded as related or unrelated to offending

based on the women's narratives around substance use. If they spoke of it as a factor in their offending or as relevant to their desistance it was identified as 'related to offending.'

Direct comparison between this cohort and the general women's prison population is not possible as the definitional parameters of the variable are different. However, the prevalence of drug use among this sample was high with 67.9% reporting drug use as related to their offending and/or important to their desistance. 53.6% of the women identified alcohol as related to their offending and/or important to their desistance. This is higher than officially recorded data that shows 46% of prisoners having concerns about their drinking (Light et al., 2013). The higher recorded rates of drug and alcohol use in this study are likely to result from the way the data was gathered. The women were not asked specifically about drug or alcohol use. Disclosure was the result of women telling the stories of how they came to be in prison. The majority of women who were returned to custody had identified alcohol and/or drugs as related to their offending. 62.5% and 78.1% of those returned to custody identified alcohol and drugs respectively as criminogenic factors.

### 5.6.2. Mental health

Forty-one women (73.2%) had diagnosed or self-reported mental health problems. 21.4% of the cohort also reported self-harming. All of those reporting self-harm also had diagnosed or self-reported mental health problems. Of those who were returned to custody, 26 women (81.3%) had a diagnosed or self-reported mental health issue.

## 5.7. Experiences of trauma and abuse

Employment, accommodation, motherhood, substance use, and mental health are factors that have been associated with desistance or persistence in the criminal careers and desistance literature. There are gendered dimensions to these that impact on the nature of the desistance journey post-release and these will be discussed in later chapters.

Experiences of trauma and victimisation emerged from the interviews as relevant to the women's pathways into and out of crime but have received little attention in existing

desistance studies. As Maruna (2001) comments in relation to the Liverpool Desistance Study, desistance research has generally been seeking commonalities in the experiences of desistance. The absence of discussion on experiences of trauma and victimisation may indicate these are gendered factors that have been revealed to be significant in this study as a result of the exclusively female cohort.

Trauma was recorded as experiences of either childhood abuse, domestic abuse, or 'other trauma' that did not include either childhood or domestic abuse. Childhood abuse was recorded if the women spoke of experiences of physical, sexual, emotional abuse, or neglect as relevant to their pathways to crime. Domestic abuse was recorded if the women reported physical, sexual, emotional abuse, or coercive control as related to their offending or behaviours contributing to their offending. 'Other trauma' was recorded when the women spoke of experiences that corresponded with the accepted definitions detailed in chapter three and were described as relevant to their offending and related behaviours. Examples of 'other trauma' described by women in this research included, but were not limited to, rape, gang rape, the removal of children, abandonment, witnessing abuse and violence, violent victimisation, bereavements, and being coerced into prostitution/sex work [see appendix A(v) for full details].

The women were not asked directly about experiences of victimisation. These were only discussed if raised spontaneously by the women during the interviews. Therefore, as high as these figures are, they are potentially an under-representation of childhood abuse, domestic abuse, and trauma in the lives of the women in this research. Table 5.8 reveals that many of the women experienced multiple types of abuse/trauma with the women reporting on average having experiences in two of the three categories.



*Table 5.8: Frequency of childhood abuse, domestic abuse, and other trauma*

	Number	Percent within cohort
Experiences of childhood abuse (including neglect, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse)	30	60%
Experiences of domestic abuse (including physical, sexual, psychological, and coercive control)	34	68%
Other experiences of trauma (other than previously denoted childhood or domestic abuse)	42	84%

The levels of childhood and domestic abuse and trauma reported by women in this cohort are higher than those reported among the general women's prison population, 53% of whom report experiences of childhood abuse and 57% domestic abuse (Ministry of Justice, 2012, 2014). They do, however, correspond with findings of other research specifically investigating such experiences (Norman and Barron, 2011; Petrillo et al., 2019; Prison Reform Trust, 2017; Women in Prison, 2018). Of those reporting experiences of abuse and trauma, 74% reported experiences in more than one of the identified categories. All of the thirty-two women who were returned to custody had reported some experience of victimisation and/or trauma as relevant to their pathway to offending. The prevalence of such experiences are so high in this group that eighteen of the twenty-six women who were not returned to prison had also reported abuse and trauma to be relevant to their offending. However, it is potentially of note that of the six women who reported no experiences of abuse and trauma in the explanations for their criminal behaviour, none were returned to custody after release.

## 5.7. Conclusion

Taken overall, these findings offer no definitive answer to the question of whether the factors associated with desistance generally also apply to women's experiences. Some factors reflected patterns identified in previous desistance studies. Short prison sentences, previous

offending, and previous experiences of imprisonment were correlated with being returned to prison after release. Demographic factors revealed mixed results. The evidence that age is the most reliable predictor of recidivism found some support in this research. Those under thirty were more likely to return to prison. However, after the 18-20 year olds, women aged 46-50 were age group most likely to be returned to prison. This problematizes the accepted belief that the older the prisoners are, the less likely they are to reoffend. There is no data on ethnicity and desistance against which to compare the findings of this study, but analysis of progress towards desistance by ethnicity reveals patterns that warrant further investigations.

The desisting group included the women who had fewer problems in all areas of their lives. Though they were few in number, those with stable accommodation, no substance dependency, no mental illness, and no experiences of victimisation did not return to custody.<sup>16</sup> However, the most striking finding from analysis of these factors is the prevalence of problems in these areas among the women in this research. The extent of substance misuse, mental ill-health, experiences of trauma and victimisation, unemployment, and inappropriate accommodation are such that most women, whether they were returned to custody or remained in the community, experienced problems in these areas.

This thesis will now use gendered perspectives and trauma theories to explore in more detail how some of these factors are relevant to change processes identified as important to successful desistance.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, Chloe, Dana, Erin, Frankie, Nicolette, and Patsy

## 6. Relationships: The role of relationships in women's desistance

Chapter two outlines how relationships have been positioned as critical to the desistance process. They are a mechanism of informal social control (Laub and Sampson, 1993), they can provide access to jobs, non-offending peers, and pro-social uses of leisure time, thereby increasing social capital (Gadd and Farrall, 2004; Weaver and McNeill, 2015). Relationships can provide a secure base from which to develop a new, pro-social self (Ansbro, 2008; Rex, 1999), and provide new roles within which these identities can be reified (Maruna, 2001). Relationships are also positioned as central to desistance practice. Desistance-focused practice in the justice system centres on ideas of the 'working alliance' (Egan, 2001: 37), relationships characterised by collaboration, respect, encouragement, and clear boundaries between individuals and criminal justice practitioners (Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Lewis, 2016; Rex, 1999). Thus, it is argued here that personal and professional relationships are the foundation for all the other desistance processes. Individual motivation can trigger change, but it is through personal, familial, friendship, and community relationship networks that change is sustained (Baldry, 2010).

Relationships dominated the discussions in this research, though in a way that revealed gendered dimensions to how they are experienced when trying to sustain desistance. A key feminist critique of desistance theories has been their inattention to the role of relationships in women's offending. Women in the justice system often report unhealthy or exploitative relationships with partners, friends, and family members (Covington, 1998, 2003). Relational trauma has been shown to be a catalyst for women's offending (Corston, 2007; Daly, 1994; Katz, 2000; Salisbury and van Voorhis, 2009) and a factor in the onset of crime-related behaviours (DeHart, 2008; DeHart et al., 2014). Among the women in this study, 89% had experienced some form of relationship trauma, be that neglect, physical, sexual, or emotional abuse in childhood and/or domestic abuse. Therefore, understanding the role of relationships in women's desistance requires in-depth understanding of the complex relational contexts that have characterised the women's lives.

The theme of relationships was developed by first coding the discussions as relationship types; 'intimate relationships,' 'parental and other family relationships,' and 'peer relationships.' In addition, relationships with children were so significant to the women that these were initially coded as a separate category. During the focused and theoretical coding phases, I looked for common themes within these different relationships. I interpreted these as 'damaged attachments,' 'vulnerability,' 'relationships with children,' and 'safety in relationships.'<sup>17</sup>

Research with complex trauma survivors has identified how prolonged trauma impacts on the individual and their subsequent relationships. This chapter uses trauma perspectives as a blueprint for understanding the women's relationship experiences and their role in desistance. It starts with analysis of the women's positive relationships and how they are perceived to support desistance, focusing on relationships with intimate partners and families of origin. Following this, it explores the associations between damaged attachments and relational vulnerability on the availability of relationships that can support sustained personal change. The latter part of the chapter considers the strengths and limitations of key relationships in sustaining desistance, namely relationships with children, families of origin, and professionals. The chapter concludes that whilst relationships can provide a foundation for desistance processes, they were also frequently a precarious, risky aspect of the women's lives that have to be carefully managed if they are to help sustain change.

## 6.1. The value of positive relationships to sustaining desistance

In common with previous desistance research with women, positive relationships were identified as essential to sustaining desistance after prison (Bui and Morash, 2010). This chapter now examines the women's perceptions of positive relationships with intimate partners and with families of origin as they relate to the desistance process.

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<sup>17</sup> These themes were consolidated from second phase codes: 'being saved,' 'triggering pathways to crime,' 'damaged attachments,' 'feeling vulnerable and exploited,' 'seeking safety,' and 'withdrawing.'

### 6.1.1. Perceptions of positive intimate relationships

Explanations for correlations between intimate relationships and desistance generally refer to rational choice, social control, and social learning theories. Strong, emotional bonds lead to changes in routine activities directed at sustaining a newly acquired stake in conformity (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Sampson and Laub, 2003; Gadd and Farrall, 2004). Simultaneously, these relationships exert informal social control over the individual by reducing opportunities for crime, limiting access to offending peers and creating alternative social relations, such as those within the family, which are incompatible with offending (Warr, 1998; Weaver, 2012). Heterosexual marriage or 'marriage-style' relationships have been found to support desistance as, for men, female partners have been found to exercise a pro-social, stabilising influence (Horney et al., 1995). Accordingly, women have been positioned as having a critical role in men's desistance (Leverentz, 2006).

Some research on women's desistance has also found marriage-style relationships to be implicated in the desistance process for some women (for example, Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2006; Mclvor et al., 2009), and this was the case in this study. Maeve had separated from her partner but identified their relationship as a conventionalising influence in her life. Through her relationship, Maeve saw her potential to live a fulfilling life free of addiction.

I never imagined that I'd stay off drugs and then when you're happy and, I don't know, you just don't want it, you see what else there is. We went on holiday, I'd never been on holiday until I met him, loads of things, learnt to drive, yeah, and I'd never done them, because I was just so involved in drugs, so it was good. Even if we don't get back together, he changed my life anyway, he made me realise what life I could have without him, so, yeah, good story (Maeve).

Positive intimate relationships were also presented as means through which women receive affirmation that they have the ability to change.

He's made me want to change as well, you know, and he doesn't do nothing, like, he doesn't even have a drink, and he still...we can still be on that same level, it makes me want to be a better person, he makes me have faith in myself, like, he believes in me so much (Janelle).

Relationships with intimate partners can offer stability, unconditional support, and understanding, characteristics that have been absent from many of the women's past relationship experiences.

..we're engaged, we've been together for three years in November. He's absolutely amazing. He's a little bit older than me, but I love him to bits, and so does he love me. He used to be on drugs, and he's been clean now for five years. And he helps me in a way as well, like, he's the only one that knows fully about my whole life. He's my rock, basically. And I can't do anything that disappoints...obviously I disappoint him but there's nothing that I can do for him to walk away, you know what I mean (Abi).

Maeve, Abi, and Janelle's comments indicate that positive intimate relationships for women have similar social control and social learning functions that generate the cognitive transformations identified as necessary to sustain desistance. However, feminists have long argued that mechanisms of social control, including intimate relationships, are gendered, with the social control of women and girls aimed at enforcing conformity with traditional notions of femininity (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2013). The informal social control of women is entrenched in, and constitutive of patriarchal social structures, of which marriage is one (MacKinnon, 1989). It could be argued that the extant associations between intimate relationships and desistance are underpinned by gendered, hetero-normative constructions of relationships, the nature of which may not support desistance for women in the same way they do for men (Gadd and Farrall, 2004; Leverentz, 2006). Desistance theories depict marriage-style relationships as anchors that tether errant men to law-abiding lifestyles (Sampson and Laub, 2003). The control experienced through these relationships is benevolent and chosen. The women in this study presented the men with whom they were in positive relationships not so much as anchors, but as 'knights in shining armour' who repeatedly rescue their persistently wayward women. For men, relationships may cultivate the independence and ambition associated with male desistance. By contrast, the women's 'Cinderella' stories (Giordano et al., 2002: 1044) evidence that a 'good' relationship is one that enables her to survive. The paternalism implied does not automatically diminish the value of these relationships to desistance, but does warrant specific interrogation, given that the evidence of the importance of intimate relationships to women's desistance is inconsistent (Sheehan and Trotter, 2018).

The framing of relationships in the desistance literature also ignores the significant risk of abuse women face in intimate relationships. Whereas for men, intimate relationships are shown to foster self-confidence and agency (Laub and Sampson, 1993, 2003; Maruna, 2001), for women, these relationships appear as likely to foster dependence and duty. There was an implication that the partners in these women's lives could help them sustain desistance by *exerting* control over them. In extreme, though not exceptional, cases this amounted to abuse that was perceived as deserved, or for their own good.

When I was on drugs, he has slapped me and that but not beaten me up. Because I'm a bit mouthy. But no, once I'm not on drugs, our relationship's quite fine, he doesn't hit me, doesn't disrespect me, and he's very positive. He believes I can change. He says, once I go back on drugs, he just thinks, oh, here we go again. So yeah, no, my partner is one of the good ones, he's alright. He's a lot older but he's one of the good ones (Misha).

The conventionality in women's depictions of positive intimate relationships is noted in this (see chapter eight) and other studies on women's desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2006). Male desisters have been shown to embrace the role of 'breadwinner' as a positive expression of masculinity (Gadd, 2006; Sloane, 2016; Weaver and McNeill, 2015). Within relationships, this is an active role that, whilst not without pressure, can cultivate self-efficacy and social capital, thus supporting desistance. By contrast, this model places women in a submissive, passive role. This comment is not intended to diminish women's self-determination and decision-making around relationships. Embodying and performing cultural idealisations of femininity through such relationships can increase self-esteem and confidence and provide a level of agency that would otherwise be absent from their lives (Evans, 2018). However, it does suggest that their options for relationships that support autonomy and social growth, and consequently desistance, are more limited. The male bias in desistance studies means this critique of intimate relationships, as compelling submission rather than supporting self-actualisation, is virtually absent. Further evidence of this particular gendered problem with intimate relationships was revealed by women who were in relationships of 'convenience.' These women were not emotionally bonded to their partners, but their partners were perceived as supporting desistance by providing housing and financial security. Vila, Amy, and Victoria are examples of women who were in such relationships. Although her comments below suggest Vila has some power in this

relationship, this is tempered by her vulnerability to exploitation resulting from her dependence on her partner for her basic survival needs.

I've got a partner and I've been with him for a couple of months, and to be honest with you, yeah, I don't like him or love him, I'm with him because I know he's helping me but I'm feeling bad just saying it. But I know this guy's got feelings towards me (Vila).

Prior research has shown that men who reside with a partner are less likely to commit crime, but the reverse is true for women (Di Li and Mackenzie, 2003 cited in Sheehan and Trotter, 2018). There were examples in this research of women who had what they perceived as positive, supportive relationship arrangements that could support their efforts to desist from crime. However, a gendered perspective on these relationships indicates that they may not support accompanying desistance processes, such as identity transformation and the development of agency, to the same extent that positive intimate relationships have been shown to do for men.

### 6.1.2. Positive relationships with families of origin and extended families

Research on women's desistance has repeatedly found relationships with their families of origin to be more important than their intimate relationships in their efforts to desist from crime (Leverentz, 2014; McIvor et al., 2009; Stone et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2012). These relationships have been identified as significant to women even among those who experienced abuse within their families and whose families are implicated in their offending (Leverentz, 2014). This study finds further evidence of the significance of connections with parents and extended family members to women's efforts to leave crime behind.

Though some of the women's mothers were implicated in their abuse (see p.111), for others they were a source of unconditional support, often despite extremely challenging circumstances. Alice's mother suffered significant mental health problems but continued to mother her daughter, providing for her immediate needs.

I can bet you what's going to happen the day I get released. I'm going to go home, the first day my mum's going to give me money for shopping, she's going to give me shopping as well, food shopping, she's going to make sure I've got clothes and anything else I need, and money. She's like that (Alice).



Others who were identified as positive support for the women were those who had protected them when they had been in danger in their immediate families. These people were represented by the women as sources of emotional stability and safety. Grandmothers featured prominently in these roles.

My mum's died, but I've got the strength of the family, I've got my gran, and she's always been there for me, through good and bad (Miriam, initial interview).

The women clearly felt a sense of accountability to those who had showed them care and compassion during difficult periods in their childhoods. The women did not want their 'failures' to reflect on those who had cared for them, as Abi explains when talking about her long-term foster family.

I'm not saying they turned me into the woman...they did turn me into the woman that I am now in the good ways, but I don't want them to be disappointed in the bad ways that I've done (Abi).

These relationships are significant to the women's efforts to desist because they are a source of material and emotional refuge. But they are also qualitatively different to those presented as important to male desistance. In addition to providing a '*safe haven*,' Maruna and Immarigeon (2004: 67) depict families of origin for men as a resource through which they can expand their social capital. They explain that men can '*inherit their father's social capital*' (Maruna and Immarigeon, 2004: 66), particularly in the acquisition of employment. None of the women in this research identified their families as a resource in this way. So, whilst families of origin and extended families can provide protection to support the women's efforts to change, there is less evidence that they actively support this form of progression.

This research adds more evidence to previous findings that familial and intimate relationships can be important to women's desistance. However, women's sex and gender roles in traditional marriage style relationships and the limitations of their family networks in the acquisition of social capital both present gendered limitations and complications to how these relationships contribute to the desistance process.

## 6.2. Damaged attachments

Desistance theories have acknowledged the presence of familial adversity in the lives of those in the justice system. There has been some analysis of the potential impacts of childhood victimisation on recidivism and desistance (see for example, Anumba et al., 2012; Craig et al., 2017; Craig, 2019). However, there has been limited analysis of how this impacts specifically on the relational development identified as necessary for successful desistance. As presented in chapter five, the prevalence of familial abuse among the women in this research was high. This chapter will now use theories of complex trauma to examine the women's experiences of childhood abuse and trauma, their associations with their offending, and their impact on relational aspects of the desistance process.

There is extensive research on the developmental impact of damaged early attachments (Ansbro, 2008, 2019). Securely attached children develop a sense of themselves as worthy of attention and love and of others as reliable and available (Bowlby, 1973/1998). When these 'working models' (Bowlby, 1973/1998: 236-243) of relationships are damaged by abuse during developmental periods, the child's emotional and psychological development is compromised (Courtois, 2004). Consequently, relationships come to be perceived as dangerous, stressful, and frightening (Craissati, Joseph and Skett, 2015) and survivors of childhood abuse often exhibit disturbances in relational development (Herman, 1992).

Clinically, coping strategies developed in childhood to survive abuse and trauma have been shown to contribute to psychological problems including depression, anxiety, self-hatred, dissociation, substance misuse, re-victimisation, and self-destructive behaviours (Ansbro, 2019; Courtois, 2004, Herman 1992, 1992/2015). Specifically, in the realm of relationship development, damaged attachments can cause persistent mistrust, emotional lability, and withdrawal that can impede the development of positive, functional relationships that support desistance.

Each woman's story of their family relationships was different, but in the many that featured experiences of neglect, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, the women cited these common responses of mistrust, emotional lability, and withdrawal as both contributing to

their offending and presenting obstacles to them forming positive future relationships (Herman, 1992/2015; van der Kolk, 2014). Diane's comments about her childhood experiences illustrate these impacts. She talks of her problems with emotional regulation, specifically anger. She describes herself as isolated from her family, 'the black sheep.' She identifies trusting others as her 'difficult thing.'

I've been abused from the age of five, so I needed help to deal with that. And my anger has always been towards men, it's always been towards men and nobody else; so I needed help to deal with that, for somebody to listen out to how I was...I was a child, you understand, this things was not my fault;...I'm the black sheep of the family, I get in trouble all the time...Due to this, you don't trust nobody, you know, that's going to be my difficult thing, I just don't see the point in trusting anybody alive (Diane).

### **Persistent mistrust**

Work with trauma survivors has revealed how relational trauma damages trust. Children who attempt to disclose abuse are often met with disbelief and inaction, both from those in their families and from professionals (Allnock and Miller, 2013). Through these experiences, they internalise the message that they cannot trust their perceptions of their own experience, nor can they trust others to protect them (van der Kolk, 2014). This had been a common experience among the women in this cohort. Amy and Tasha provide just two examples:

[My uncle] kept beating me up, raping me. And previously before this, my stepdad kept touching me up. My mum didn't believe me. I think that's what made me go off the rails because no one believed me. I told them that [my uncle] is having sex with me, he's doing stuff to me. No one believed me (Amy, initial interview).

My mum was putting me through a load of child abuse up until the age of 18, she was hitting me, throwing me down the stairs, putting soap in my mouth, she was making me eat things I didn't want to eat, she was making me drink bleach. She had threatened me with a knife as well, and she tried drowning me when I was younger in the bath (Tasha).

Tasha's school noticed bruising and called the police.

And, when she turned up and found out the police were there, the police had a word with my mum and she said, oh no I'm not touching her she must be doing it at school. She got away with it and then directly I went home she started beating me up again, and then she kept me out of school from year eight onwards (Tasha).

In adulthood, the women made connections between persistent mistrust and their ability to form and maintain personal relationships. Karina's father was had been physically abusive to

her and abandoned the family suddenly when she was around fourteen. She didn't see him for seven years. She perceives this experience as having impacted on her ability to maintain relationships,

I don't trust anyone, I don't want to be around anyone. I've literally limited my friends to about three friends (Karina).

Mistrust also presented an obstacle to forming relationships with professionals the women knew could support them, as Lynne explained when talking about her psychotherapist,

...it takes me quite a lot to trust people, because I really have big trust issues as well, you know. Yeah, I have big trust issues (Lynne, FU1).

### **Emotional lability**

A further symptom of damaged attachments is emotional lability. When children do not have their physical, emotional and psychological needs met, or these are intentionally undermined by abusive caregivers, they can struggle to recognise and name their own emotions, to understand them, and to know how to regulate and manage them safely (Craissati et al., 2015). They may also find it difficult to understand others' mental states (Ansbro, 2019). This has implications for the development of empathy and the individual's capacity to recognise, tolerate, and relieve emotional dysregulation (Williams, 2006).

Charlene describes this experience as follows,

It's like a baby when he comes into the world and they look around, like, confused and that, that's, kind of, how I think I felt. It's like I had this emotion but it was like it would hurt, every emotion would hurt, or whatever I was feeling I would hurt because I didn't know actually what it was. And then so I'll try and block it out and just think, you know, and I don't feel nothing. That was the kind of thing that I lived by (Charlene).

The women in this study spoke of how protracted denial of their experiences of trauma led to problems with emotional containment, particularly expressions of rage, which were later associated with their offending. Bette had experienced childhood sexual abuse and later domestic abuse. She was in custody for a violent offence against her ex-partner. She relates her offending directly to these experiences and her inability to manage her emotional responses.

A lot of things I hadn't dealt with, I've tended to run away from it and that was what my problem was, but it was because I had too much going on...and I just kept exploding (Bette).

Where there were victims of the women's anger, they were universally within the relationship milieu which had also given rise to their abuse. Women who were in prison for offences of violence against the person had attacked either abusive partners, family members, or those involved in their sexual exploitation, a well-documented pattern in women's violent offending (see for example, Batchelor, 2005; Wykes and Welsh, 2009).

Neneh was in custody for violent offences against a member of her family. She had been physically abused by her step-father and witnessed his abuse of her mother. She told me that when she was a child,

I didn't have no emotions then. I didn't have no feelings. It was just cold. I didn't care.

But as she got older, she became increasingly plagued by anger and intrusive violent thoughts,

I was never like a suicidal kind of kid, like even now, with what's going on in my life I've never been one to want to commit suicide and hurt myself, but I always get angry and want to hurt other people, that's my problem (Neneh).

Hostility, defiance, aggression, coercion, and violence are common responses to these confused emotional states (Courtois and Ford, 2016). Feelings may be directed at the perpetrator or displaced onto others, particularly those in positions of authority. They may also manifest in the form of self-harm or suicidality (Courtois and Ford, 2016). A framework for supporting women's desistance necessitates attention to the behavioural and emotional responses to damaged attachments that contribute to offending and may impact on desistance.

## **Withdrawal**

At the other end of the spectrum from 'acting out' adaptations to damaged attachments is for the victim to withdraw and isolate themselves, both physically and emotionally. Both Neneh and Charlene above, illustrate how emotional withdrawal can manifest simultaneously

with expressions of anger and aggression, each triggering the other in a vicious cycle of emotional uncertainty.

Ruby had been removed from her 'pisshead dad and crackhead mother' at the age of four. Between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, she was in twenty-two different care and foster placements. She responded to her damaged attachments by emotionally detaching from relationships.

I don't think everyone needs a family at the end of the day, I ain't for a family, me and my mum have got the most broken relationship you've ever seen, my dad died, my brother died, I don't need a family ... if I rely on myself ain't no-one going to let me down. I've been let down, believe me, I've been let down, I've been hurt...I've been beaten, everything you can think of I've had it done but it doesn't bother me (Ruby).

The process of abuse intentionally isolates the victim, which can set relational withdrawal as a lifelong pattern of behaviour in trauma survivors (Courtois and Ford, 2016). Katy was abused by three members of her family, her step-dad and two uncles. Others in Katy's family were complicit in the abuse, outwardly disbelieving her accounts whilst tacitly acknowledging it in other ways.

And we used to have family gatherings, my other uncle used to turn up...my aunt used to say, Katy, shut the [bedroom] door because he mistakes it sometimes for the toilet, when he's had too much to drink (Katy).

Her isolation within her family made her withdraw from other relationships, a pattern that has persisted into her adulthood.

So yeah, it was kind of a nightmare when I was a child, and I was kind of a loner if you like, because I didn't want to...even now, today, I don't want to know, well not to know anyone, I don't want any friends, put it that way. Because of what I've been through, and what they keep on putting me through (Katy).

One of the most common ways in which women withdraw, is through substance use. By way of example, Maeve explained that she started using crack cocaine and heroin at the age of fourteen after being taken into care.

My mum and dad were both alcoholics, my dad had abused me so I had to go into care for my own safety and I suppose I had all that to deal with, and it was just my way of forgetting everything, my way of escaping (Maeve).

Intimate and interpersonal trauma increases the risk of subsequent mental health and substance use problems. These further limit the likelihood of women forming relationships that can support efforts to desist (Covington, 1998).

It has been observed that adult survivors of childhood abuse can have symptoms that are also associated with borderline personality disorder (BPD) (Herman, 1992). Difficulties in relationships including emotional dysregulation, repeated re-victimisation, difficulties staying connected to therapeutic relationships, withdrawal, and dependency are characteristic of diagnoses of BPD (World Health Organisation, 2010). Associating emotional dysregulation and damaged attachment with women's offending has attracted criticism centred on tendencies to pathologise women's behaviour (Carlton and Segrave, 2013). Feminist criminologists maintain that an illness-based approach to trauma can be alienating and disempowering. Covington (2012) states that the promotion of an illness-based model fundamentally misunderstands the women's traumatic responses, which are not symptoms of individual pathology but '*normal reactions to abnormal or extreme situations*' (p.2). Frameworks for understanding women's desistance must be mindful of such critiques and reject the interpretation of normal responses to trauma as personality disorder. However, there is also a need to acknowledge the links between responses to trauma and offending. For the women in this research, the trajectory from abuse, to overwhelming emotions, to offending, was straightforward and direct. As Diane's story continues,

I guess growing up, going through a bad time in life is where my offending, I started breaking the law, I'd been in care, and things that has happened to me through childhood, I've not been able to deal with it. So I've not been able to deal with things, and you build up that anger, you just get angry at the world... (Diane).

Desistance studies are beginning to consider the role of emotions in the change process (for example, Farrall et al., 2014; Hamilton, 2016; Vaughan, 2007). However, as Hamilton (2016) identifies, much of this theorising is restricted to emotional commentary on the change process as opposed to analysis of the links between emotions, crime, and desistance. Emotional bonding is a key component of desistance supporting relationships. The women's experiences illustrate the impact of damaged attachments on the development of such bonds.

### 6.3. Vulnerability in relationships

...if you talk to a lot of women in here, most of us are in here because of men, partners or ex's, so men in our lives. My whole dorm, all of us is because of men. You will find another dorm is the same thing, a lot of us, the guy did this (Kim).

...the majority of women that I've met in there, it's all been through males, do you know what I mean, the reason why they're in there. They've had a domestic relationship, they've ended up using drugs, they've started nicking, they've started, you know. They've got to do that to feed their family. And it's, they don't do it, because oh yeah, it's a joke, do you know what I mean (Catherine, FU2).

Despite the gendered nature of domestic and sexual abuse, most of the existing desistance research (a notable exception being Gadd and Farrall, 2004) has not examined relationships as a site of offending, nor desistance from offending that is perpetrated within relationships (Evans, 2018). Studies have shown that female survivors of childhood abuse are at increased risk of repeated victimisation in adulthood (Arias, 2004; Trickett, Noll and Putnam, 2011). For example, the risk of rape, sexual harassment, and domestic abuse is approximately doubled for survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Russell, 1986 cited in Herman, 1992). Vulnerability to repeated abusive relationships has been found to be symptomatic of complex trauma and damaged attachments (Ansbro, 2019; Herman 1992/2015). Vulnerability to repeated abuse and sexual exploitation was a feature of many of the women's relationship experiences.

My life has been everyone keeps being violent to me, maybe I'm an easy target. Every relationship, even if it's a friendship, every relationship I've had with people there's always been violence (Tasha).

When coding observations about vulnerability, I was uneasy with the word. I felt that it was not a description of which the women would approve, as they tended to associate it with weakness. Diane articulated this in her interview when she spoke about putting a 'front' to appear strong,

But it's just a front because you don't hang your washing outside on the line for everyone to see, otherwise people will take advantage of your vulnerableness, and I wasn't prepared for anyone to see me as a weak person (Diane).

The Oxford English Dictionary definition, however, does not imply weakness, describing vulnerability as *'the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or*



*harmed, either physically or emotionally.*' The gendered nature of the word, as it is predominantly applied to women and children, reinforces the notion of vulnerability as embodied by those too young or weak to secure their own safety, but these are cultural interpretations that are a product of a masculinised discourse rather than etymology. Revisiting the women's narratives from the perspective of vulnerability being exposure to harm helped clarify how their vulnerability was related to their desistance, as relationships in which women are vulnerable or unsafe cannot help sustain desistance.

Tasha was far from alone in her experiences of re-victimisation. Among this cohort, 70% of those who experienced any form of prior trauma<sup>18</sup> had also experienced intimate partner abuse. It is important to emphasise that victims do not 'seek' further victimisation (Herman, 1992/2015). Both trauma and attachment theories emphasise that the majority of survivors go on to enjoy positive relationships (Ansbro, 2019; Herman, 1992/2015). However developmental trauma can leave women vulnerable to unsafe relationships as they often experience difficulty in maintaining appropriate boundaries in relationships, fluctuating between being overly distant from to overly reliant on others (Williams, 2006; Herman 1992/2015). Learned patterns of response to damaged attachments explained above, such as passivity, compliance, withdrawal, and disorganised attachment, increase their vulnerability (Courtois and Ford, 2016). Covington (2016) highlights a further dimension to the gendered nature of re-victimisation. Beyond childhood, boys are at increased risk of experiencing repeated violence if they are gay, young men of colour, or gang affiliated. Men are most likely to be harmed by an enemy or a stranger. Women are most at risk in relationships. They are most likely to be harmed by a family member or partner (Covington and Russo, 2016).

Misha's story exemplifies how experiences of abuse, damaged attachments, vulnerability, mental health, substance use problems, and re-victimisation all interact to trap her in a lifestyle of drugs, crime, and prison. Misha's mum suffered from addictions and exposed Misha to drugs and crime from a young age.

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<sup>18</sup> Including childhood neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and any other form of abuse as identified in chapter 5 and appendix A.

So I've been doing crime from really, really young, so I was, like, yeah, want to go Holloway, be a big girl, tell my mum I've got a criminal record. She's my best friend, so I've got a lot of things going on with her, innit, so like I crave her love and stuff. So, therefore, from a young age, I've always done things to impress her. Like, I learnt to shoplift from the age of nine, do you know what I mean, like big, big shops. And that was like when she come home, well done, it made me feel better, innit...

Misha was eventually taken into local authority care where she was sexually abused.

So it really emotionally traumatised me...I started hearing voices when I was younger. And then my sister passed away when I was 12. So when she passed...I was drinking because I was in, like, by the time I was 11, I was in, like, 34 different foster placements. And that's a lot, yeah. My sister got leukaemia and I started drinking a lot more. When she passed away when I was 12, I got drunk, innit, and gang raped in the park. So when that happened, I then turned to my mum. When I turned to my mum, my mum starting selling me. So obviously, because I've been...that's a lot of abuse, do you know what I mean.

Abuse and loss characterised Misha's teenage years. At age 14 she had her first child.

I lost my daughter, stillborn, and had my son. My son was due to being gang raped. Then I had my...and he was taken off me. My daughter was taken off me. And then, like, I just got in abusive relationships, I was put on the game because [my partner] was feeding me drugs. And then when he got me proper hooked on heroin, he then sent me out to work, do you know what I mean...

Misha identified her vulnerability to abusive relationships as her 'destiny.'

And then I come into prison last January, yeah, last year, January, and I got out in March. This is the first time I got out, got someone to meet me at the gate, my drug worker from my community, got them all to meet me, went to the housing, got a hostel, and then found out I was pregnant. Was doing really well, working...my mate works in the cinema, so he gave me, like, a trial basis. My partner's violent, innit, and kicked me down the stairs, and I lost my baby at five months. And from when that happened, it was just like I'm destined for bad...

Misha's story exemplifies the links between childhood adversity, re-victimisation in relationships, and offending. Misha was abused by her mother, then in care, then by successive partners. One could also add to this the numerous professional agencies she passed through, including the justice system, which failed to protect her. Her story illustrates how girls, and later women, who have been abused are a target for repeated victimisation. Symptoms of their damaged attachments, their isolation, neediness, compromised emotions

and ability to protect themselves, and their ongoing availability to repetitive contact with abusers, leave them vulnerable (Courtois and Ford, 2016).

When vulnerability to re-victimisation in relationships is interpreted as resulting from individual weakness, the change needs to be enacted by the individual alone. The woman has to be strong, leave the relationship, protect herself and her children, prosecute her abusers, and account for her victimisation. When it is interpreted as exposure to harm, it requires socio-cultural change, involving external recognition and support within the community. Overcoming weakness requires strength, but overcoming vulnerability requires safety.

## 6.4. Relationships with children

All the women in the study who were mothers spontaneously raised their relationships with their children as significant in their efforts to desist from crime, echoing findings of previous research that has positioned motherhood as a key, though complex, factor in women's desistance (for example, Bachman et al., 2016; Goodwin, 2016; Graham and Bowling, 1996; Leverentz, 2014; Sharpe, 2015). For mothers in this study, their successful desistance appeared to hinge on their relationships with their children, yet these too were marred by the damaged attachments, vulnerability, and experiences of separation and withdrawal that characterised the women's other relationships.

### **Relationships with children and damaged attachments**

Damaged relationships with children are identified as one of the 'gendered pains' of imprisonment (Crewe, Hulley and Wright, 2017: 1359). As most primary care givers are women, the imprisonment of a mother is particularly devastating for both child and mother. Although it is estimated that around 17,000 children are affected by maternal imprisonment each year, the exact figure is not known (Corston, 2007; Prison Reform Trust, 2018). This information is not systematically collected by prisons and women are often reluctant to disclose whether they have children owing to fear of having them removed. Only 5% of the children of mothers in prison are cared for by their fathers during the mother's incarceration

(Corston, 2007). Of the thirty-two mothers in this study, nineteen had children under the age of sixteen. Only three of the fathers were looking after these children.<sup>19</sup> It has been identified that the experience of custody for mothers is aggravated by the women's constant anxiety about the well-being of their children (Corston 2007; Ferraro and Moe, 2003). It has been argued that this distress manifests in elevated instances of self-harm and behavioural issues in women's prisons (Corston, 2007; Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2019).

The interviews with mothers in prison revealed the extent to which women in prison are preoccupied with the standard of care their children are receiving in their absence. Baldwin's (2015) study found women in prison were particularly concerned about not knowing where the children are, progress of official care proceedings, and the safety of their children whilst in the care of others. Women in this project echoed these concerns. Rosie, for example, had committed an offence of criminal damage, her first offence. She was on bail for a year and a half, during which time she had fled the traveller community in which she had been raised with her six-year-old son, leaving a husband who had abused her for eleven years, since their marriage when Rosie was just sixteen. However, she was sentenced to immediate custody without a pre-sentence report, so she was unable to explain that her son has haemophilia. He was being looked after by Rosie's sister, but she had her own children and was not used to providing constant care to a critically ill child. Having already experienced the death of one terminally ill child, Rosie was profoundly anxious about his welfare.

I inject him every day. If he has a fall, it can kill him. Everything has to be sterilised because if he gets an infection, it can kill him (Rosie).

There is evidence that maintaining bonds between parent and child during incarceration can be beneficial for both, but prison rules generally do not facilitate this. Women are often held in prisons far from home and relationships with those looking after their children can be complex (Opsal, 2015), as in Alice's situation, whose children were in the care of the sister of her abusive ex-partner (see p. 122).

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<sup>19</sup> These were the fathers of Catherine, Jill, and Patsy's children. Charlene's lesbian partner was also looking after their child, though Charlene had no parental rights in respect of the child.

Patterns of separation and loss that had characterised their own childhoods were frequently being repeated in their relationships with their children. Twenty-one of the women had previous or current social services' involvement with their children. This ranged from early stage child protection proceedings to adoptions. Misha explains that she hit 'breaking point' when her children were taken into care as she feared exposing them to the harms that had been perpetrated against her.

Having my daughter taken off me and not being given the chance to...I had my daughter and then I come to prison. And it was like, I was trying and trying and trying and I had to go to court for her whilst I was in here [prison]. And to hear that you are not going to be able to see your daughter...it just...I've been in care, so I know once my kids have gone in care, I'm never getting them back. So I think that was just like breaking point for me (Misha).

Misha's comments speak to the women's desire to prove themselves as mothers and how this is impeded by their past experiences of victimisation. It has been argued that removing children from mothers in abusive relationships represents a failure of child protection services to respond appropriately to domestic abuse (Ferraro and Moe 2003). It was clear that the women in this study experienced this as a punishment for their victimisation.

If you haven't neglected your children in any way and it's been out of your hands why they can't live with you, for instance because I got raped a few times and I just didn't cope too well in my mind, so through things like that, if it's been a bit out of your hands then I believe that you should get to see your children (Alice).

For many imprisoned mothers, their only source of hope and motivation during their imprisonment and transition back to the community is a connection with their children (Covington, 2003). Alice, along with several other women, cited not being able to have contact with their children as the thing that would threaten sustained desistance. Lucy had experience of just this scenario, and it had been devastating.

My daughter was my purpose she kept me strong but when she was taken from me at that occasion I just was like what do I do? What do I do? I can't...I haven't got to get up in the morning and do school run and all of that. I ain't busying myself and then when you lose that it is like a loss, it's like oh...your total control's gone of your life, it's gone. And you feel like...when it happened to me I felt so low, I swear I was...really upset, I couldn't even describe it, it really destroyed me at first and that's why I ended up on heroin and ended up breaking the law (Lucy).

## **Relationships with children and vulnerability**

Though highly valued, caring for children has been shown to be particularly demanding for parents who have experienced trauma and abuse (Covington, 2003; Steele et al., 2016). It has been shown that adverse childhood experiences are significantly associated with parental stress, even after controlling for other factors such as poverty and maternal mental illness (Steele et al., 2016). This research found that the women's relationships with their children can reproduce patterns of vulnerability and withdrawal, compounding social deprivation and isolation, and trapping the women in abusive contacts with their children's fathers.

The women's relationships with their children could also indirectly expose them to further harm in their relationships. Twenty (62%) of the mothers had been abused by their children's fathers. What follows is an extract from Alice's interview as an example of how relationships with children can tie women to abusive partners, causing them to fear not just for their own well-being, but also their children's.

He kept hitting me and hitting me and hitting me. I believe in my heart that that's why the baby passed away. The baby couldn't take it. I couldn't take it as it was, so imagine the baby, the baby couldn't take it. The baby's only small and stuff, and babies aren't designed to go through things like that.

What happened was I was too weak to leave him after I lost the baby, so we ended up staying together for probably about two years or so, a year and a bit after that, and then one time then he smashed up my house with a baseball bat and stuff and he just used to put me through hell, like always hitting me and stuff, so one time I had to climb out the window when he went out to leave him. I left my house, my car, everything with just the clothes I was wearing, and then I found out five months after I was pregnant. Bloody hell, I found out I was having his child. Fucking hell, God cursed me.

So I was very happy to have my daughter, but it was just a lot to know that I was having his child. He wouldn't believe it. He said no, I'm not pregnant but obviously because of the domestic violence, I wouldn't let him see me throughout the pregnancy, because I thought I can't put the baby at risk because of what had happened before. So, when the baby was three months old, I did a DNA test because I had to prove the child was his, because he kept saying it wasn't, and it got proven that it was his child and then he saw her when she was three months old, but I didn't want him to see her, but he went to social services. So he was allowed to have contact and stuff, and now my daughter lives with his sister. I didn't want that to happen (Alice).

Twenty-six (81%) of the mothers in this cohort had been or were currently single mothers.

Single parenthood is a key marker of social deprivation. Almost half (48%) of single-parent

households are living in poverty. In the majority (86%) of such households, the single parent is the mother (Women's Budget Group, 2018). This leaves women vulnerable to the financial and emotional strain this entails. These stresses were directly linked to their offending for some, particularly those sentenced for acquisitive or child neglect offences. Kim points to the lack of social provision for single mothers who are struggling.

I remember when we used to go the centres with the kids, what's happened, you know what I mean, what's happened to that? It helped, because you're stuck in doors, you're there, you're lonely... (Kim)

The development of relationships that provide access to social capital has been shown by the desistance research to be central in supporting ex-offenders in moving away from crime (Farrall et al., 2014). However, research has found social capital to be contingent on structural factors such as gender, ethnicity, marital status, socio-economic position, and social integration (Song, 2012). The collective character of social capital can make it unattainable for those who suffer social exclusion, including criminalised women (Portes, 1998). Ideally, with motherhood comes social and professional support networks that can offer opportunities to acquire social capital. It offers an immediate stake in society and integration into its institutions through the access it brings to healthcare, playgroups, schools, and social networks. It can reaffirm other familial bonds such as when grandparents, aunts, and siblings rally around the care of the child (Goodwin, 2016). This has been referred to as 'motherhood capital' (Portes, 1998). However, marginalised women face specific challenges in using motherhood to access social capital. Song's (2012) study found evidence that parenthood status is positively associated with quality social capital for men, but negatively for women, particularly unmarried women. This is because single mothers have more demands when parenting, consequently they are less socially integrated. They have fewer resources and have to invest a higher portion of those resources, particularly time and money, into their children. As with Kim's case, carrying the burden of parenting alone leaves them disproportionately vulnerable to criminalisation which further erodes their parental capital (Brown and Bloom, 2009).

The women's accounts of their experiences of motherhood revealed the extent to which motherhood left the women vulnerable, both materially and to repeated victimisation. It also reveals a gendered dimension to social capital. Alice's partner was able to access support

from social services with regard to maintaining access to their children in a way that had not been available to her (Rumgay, 2004a).

### **Relationships with children and patterns of avoidance and withdrawal**

Patterns of avoidance and withdrawal that enabled the women to survive their own abusive childhoods also featured in their relationships with their children. They depicted good motherhood as a delicate balance between being absent and present in their children's lives, both during their imprisonment and after release.

Maintaining contact with children whilst in custody can make prison more bearable, alleviate anxiety, and contribute to positive resettlement plans (Baldwin, 2015). However, these benefits need to be balanced with the pain of repeated separation and the potential harms of exposing children to the prison environment (Shamai and Kochal, 2008). Catherine decided that her children should not see her in prison but was aware of the pain that was causing them.

The kids, they're suffering. I spoke to [my daughter] last night and she was alright on the phone, but then I had to work and when I called her back she was hysterical and it was really hard (Catherine, initial interview).

For some of the women in this study, the stresses and emotional demands of maintaining relationships with their children resulted in them feeling the best option was for them to withdraw from these relationships. Jill's family arrangements on the surface provide the ideal circumstances for release. She would be going home to a stable relationship with her husband who had cared for their children whilst she has been in custody. In these circumstances, the cultural imperative for Jill to reunite immediately with her family is strong (Brown and Bloom, 2009). But, because of past addiction problems, her family responsibilities felt like added pressure. They increased the stakes of failure. If she was released back into her family unit when she did not feel ready and relapsed, she could lose contact with her children forever.

I need to learn how to deal with my addiction, getting thrown in with four children and a husband, a house, I mean, I'm not supposed to, you know...I'm not supposed to use and have children, am I? It's not the right thing, so I leave, so I don't bring it home. I'm jeopardising my whole family (Jill).



Addiction and mental health problems can add an additional level of burden for mothers who are trauma survivors (Brown and Bloom, 2009; Stone, 2015). At present, few treatment programmes address the needs of women with young children. Because past abuse and trauma often interfere with a mother's ability to be emotionally available and empathic with her children, a primary goal of trauma-informed services is to help women view their own recovery as part of healing the parent child relationship. Lucy's comments attest to the value of this approach.

If you've got problems and you're not dealing with them how can you be there for your child? If you can't look after yourself mentally and physically how can you expect to look after your child? You can love a child all you like but I could have been neglecting her in other ways like emotionally neglecting her or not being there for her because I am so in my own problems (Lucy).

Trauma-informed practice in this area involves education about the vulnerabilities of parenting as a trauma survivor, such as re-traumatization being triggered by a child's age or behaviour (Herman 1992/2015). It also advocates helping parents to examine trauma in the way that they were parented and how this can affect their own parenting. It prioritises supporting survivors to develop strategies of physical, emotional, and psychological self-care when caring for their children. As Elliot et al. (2005: 472) explain, *'Trauma-informed parenting services build on parents' strengths and help parents to apply them to their own healing and that of their children.'*

## 6.5. Seeking safety in relationships

The relational context of feeling safe was identified in Herman's (1992) theory of complex trauma, *'Survivors feel unsafe in their bodies. Their emotions and their thinking feel out of control. They also feel unsafe in relation to other people'* (Herman, 1992: 160).

In the initial sessions, all the participants were asked to identify their support networks, the people or activities that would help them sustain desistance. From these discussions, it was possible to identify the relationships within which the women felt safe. Neither intimate partners nor (adult) children featured much. Instead, creating safety in relationships meant

nurturing relationships with families of origin, non-intimate peer relationships, and their relationships with professionals.

Relationships with children were highly valued and presented as motivation to change, however they did not feel like 'safe' relationships. On the contrary, for reasons outlined above, they were often presented as risky, precarious relationships that would be withdrawn as punishment for any failure to maintain change. For example, Lynne, Carla, and Miriam's adult children all withdrew from their relationships at points during the follow-up period of this study in response to their lapses into drug and alcohol use.

Carla: So my children don't want to know me at the moment because I'm back in prison again for drugs.

Madeline: Did you have contact with them while you were out?

Carla: Yeah, yeah. I was seeing them and they were okay at the time, but then when they found out now I'm in here for drugs, they don't want to know me at the moment (Carla, FU2)

The damage done to these relationships means they were often characterised by guilt and shame which was aggravated by their use as a reward for staying sober and not offending, or a punishment for failure.

Last weekend I was supposed to go out with [my daughter and grand-daughter] and I got up at half past six, getting ready and everything. I thought oh lovely. And I had a drink. Because I felt happy. It's not always when I feel sad. And then I phoned her up, my grand-daughter and [my daughter] said, put that phone down, Nana's had a drink. Because they could tell straight away. I felt I let them down. I let myself down (Lynne, FU1).

Carla and Lynne are similar in age and have similar aged children. Both have grandchildren. For Carla, her relationships with her children did not help her sustain desistance. Our last conversation took place when she was back in HMP Holloway. By contrast, Lynne remained out of prison. This highlights the complexity of associating relationships with children with desistance. As with other relationships, the intricacies of the individual experience mean there is no easy equation that explains how relationships with children affect desistance.

For most of those involved in the follow-up sessions, sustaining desistance meant severing harmful intimate relationships. Though most women envisaged having marriage-style relationships in the future, their histories of abuse, the roles intimate partners have played in their offending, and the restriction they have experienced in relationships meant they were not a priority, as exemplified by Carla.

I'm not bothered about a relationship. I'd rather be on my own, to be honest. So that's why I said I want to get myself a little dog, when I get home. I'd rather have a dog as company, than a boyfriend. Get more sense out of a dog, yeah. (Carla, initial interview)

Most were experiencing problems in their intimate relationships that meant that the women felt they would have to end these relationships in order to stay safe from further abuse, psychological harm, relapse into drugs/alcohol, and offending.

It's going to hurt me, I'm going to lie because I'm attached to her, sort of, thing but I feel that if I don't break away, she's going to bring me back down in the gutter with her and I don't need to go in the gutter (Miriam, FU1).

it's like he still wants to be with me, but... I think at the moment I need to work more on myself before I even try to be in a relationship with anyone. I need to focus on what I need in my life (Michaela, FU1).

But yeah, since I've been out as well...he's broken in here through the window and that, the police know all that, I shouldn't be with him. But I'm not with him as such, but he's helped me out a bit really. My daughter can't stand him, you know what I mean. Well, none of them can, none of them. Because like obviously he's an alcoholic as well, but when he goes on one he's really bad.... Even if he comes up this time, if he's had a drink, I can't let him in. I say go away, I don't want you here (Lynne, FU2).

For these women, growth and development depended on disconnecting from intimate relationships (Brown and Ross, 2010; Baldry, 2010). Giordano et al. (2002) recognise the value of this as a cognitive transformation that can support desistance. The transition from prison to the community reinforced the sense that the women needed to disconnect from some relationships in order to make progress. This also applied to other relationships, particularly for those who had experienced abuse in their families of origin, such as Janine. Here Janine is comparing the support she received from her friend Max against that of her family.

I've never had female friends, it's always been men. It's always been drug users, but with Max, we sit and talk and I can talk to her, really, really talk to her, so that has really, really helped me... I've figured out, well, fuck my family. I've been hurt so much by

them, I don't need them. I never have, and they've never done anything for me (Janine, FU1).

Later, Janine's initial indifference gives way to the sorrow of accepting that her relationships with those who should be closest to her are, in fact, harmful and exacting an emotional toll that is unsustainable if she hopes to make changes in her life.

But I don't care no more. I don't care. I do care, but I can't care. I can't. So I've got to separate (Janine, FU1).

Accepting that they had to end some relationships was a significant feature of how women interpreted the link between relationships and desistance. Whether this was to protect themselves from physical harm, maintain psychological integrity, or to free up space to focus on themselves, the women needed permission to distance themselves from intimate relationships, relationships with children, and family relationships where there had been abuse and trauma. This came in the form of accepting that these relationships were preventing them from moving forward with their lives.

However, avoiding relationships goes against tenets of relational theory that stress the centrality of relationships to women's development (Covington, 1998, 2003; Gilligan, 1993). In order to support women's desistance, understanding which relationships can be nurtured requires practitioners to put aside assumptions about conventional relationships and hear which relationships are of value to the women. It was clear from these interviews that women are under no illusions about which relationships can help them heal and progress and which are harmful. 'Real friends,' that is those with no involvement with the justice system, or those recovering from addiction, were identified as important relationships that the women hoped to nurture on release. Relationships with parents, siblings, and extended family also featured as relationships that could be developed to provide support. The desistance research generally has identified that desisters tend not to identify professionals as particularly significant to their desistance, focusing instead on personal relationships that help them turn their lives around (Farrall et al., 2014; Maruna, 2001). However, when asked about supportive relationships, the women in this study often included professional support. Bette, for example, when asked about her support network makes no distinction between her family relationships and those she has with professional organisations,

Mum, aunt, four brothers, two sisters, lots of cousins, we're a big family. Mental health team, Women in Prison, WISH, which is a mental health organisation and probation (Bette).

This may reflect the extent of trauma and abuse in the women's lives. To nurture relationships, they need professional support. It may also reflect the extent of the women's isolation. A significant minority of the women struggled to identify anyone in their personal networks with whom they had positive relationships, and others, as explained above (section 6.2) intentionally kept their social networks small.

Just Lifeline, that's the only support I have really. Just them. (Carla, initial interview)

Professional relationships that felt particularly important were those with counsellors, psychotherapists, addictions workers, and probation officers. Several women expressed concerns about losing relationships they had established with professionals on release, as Edina explains,

I got on really well with my therapist and I just hope that when I get out we continue, but it's gonna be hard as well. Like in here you've made a good bond with someone, you've opened up to them, but when you get out you can't work with the same person. So it's like I'm gonna have to start all over again to make a bond with that new person (Edina).

These professional relationships are perceived to be of great value to the women, particularly when they have been able to maintain consistent relationships with professionals. Janelle identified her relationships with her keyworker from TRUST as one of the most important relationships in her life.

She's been my support...[TRUST] work with, like, prostitutes, vulnerable women, just like, women who have been on drugs, they're really supportive...I've had [my worker] for nine years...Yeah, I've got a lot of support from them...they go that extra mile for me, I think I can definitely do it with their help (Janelle).

Overall, relationships that felt safe to women were non-abusive, consistent, resilient, and authentic. The concept of reciprocity, its attention to reflexivity and the socio-cultural context in which the relationship is established has usefully been theorised as characteristic of desistance-supporting relationships (for example, Weaver, 2012; Weaver and McNeill, 2015).

Weaver and McNeill (2015: 96) explain that people '*make reciprocal adjustments or modifications to their behaviours as an outcome of **relational** reflexivity. In this way, social relations can motivate individuals to behave in a way that they might not otherwise have done (emphasis in original).*' However, the concept has problematic resonances in the context of lives characterised by abusive relationships. Covington's (1998) concept of mutuality perhaps better encapsulates how the women depicted safe, healthy, growth-promoting relationships (see also, Eaton, 1993). Covington (1998) describes mutuality as a way of 'being-in-relation' which includes the whole person. She explains, '*Each person can represent her feelings, thoughts, and perceptions in the relationship and can move with and be moved by the feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of the other. Each person, as well as the relationship, can change and move forward because there is mutual influence and mutual responsiveness*' (Covington, 1998: 118). In this way, relationships based on mutuality account for and address the gender power imbalances that have tended to socialise women into subordinate positions in both professional and personal relationships, impacting on their roles, identities, and autonomy within relational spaces.

## 6.6. Conclusion

Like relationships, I just can't, like, I don't know what I'm doing, do you know what I mean. Really, have not got a clue. How do you maintain a relationship? (Catherine, FU2).

Giordano et al. (2002) suggest that relationships may be even more significant to women's desistance than they are to men's. In many ways, women's social status and access to resources remain tied to their relationships, particularly those with partners and children. Additionally, relational theory posits that women develop a sense of self and self-worth when their actions are driven by and nurture connections with others (Covington, 1998; Gilligan, 1993). Therefore, connection is a guiding principle of psychological and emotional growth for women (Bloom, 2003; Covington, 1998; Gilligan, 1993). A relational context has been shown to be critical in understanding the onset of criminal behaviour among women, so is necessarily a consideration in how women move away from crime and reintegrate into the community.

That said, relationships have been narrowly interpreted as supporting desistance as a means of *'helping ex-offenders escape harmful social contexts'* (Maruna and Immarigeon, 2004: 720). This formulation does not reflect women's significantly different experiences of and attitudes to many of the social bonds and informal social controls fundamental to the desistance model, in particular the centrality of the marriage-style relationship (Baldry, 2010). This perspective is blind to the fact that relationships, for many women in the justice system, *are* their harmful social context.

As evidenced in this and other studies, much of women's trauma happens in a relational context. If women in the justice system are to change, grow, and recover, it is critical that they be in programmes and environments in which relationships founded on mutuality are a core element (Baldry, 2010; Covington, 1998; Herman, 1992).

### **Principles for practice: Managing relationships.**

This study's analysis of experiences of relationships from a trauma perspective concludes that this aspect of desistance may be supported in several ways, which are advocated in other research:

- educate women about the impact of childhood abuse on adult relationships, including issues of relational vulnerability (Herman, 1992/2015)
- help identify and nurture safe relationships with mutuality at their core (Covington, 2008; Weaver, 2011)
- educate women about parenting as a trauma survivor, including problems of re-traumatisation (Elliot et al., 2005)
- exhibit sensitivity to the needs of women who have lost children (through bereavement or the child safeguarding interventions)
- provide practical and therapeutic support to women who want to leave abusive relationships
- teach non-harmful coping skills and self-care techniques (Covington and Russo, 2016)

## 7. Restoration:

### Shame, stigma, and identity in women's desistance

The previous chapter explains that one way in which relationships support desistance is through their capacity to provide roles through which ex-offenders can create new versions of themselves. Research has consistently found that desisters share an ability to 'knife off' or reinterpret the past and re-define themselves within non-offender identities (Healy, 2013; Maruna and Roy, 2007; Laub and Sampson, 1993). Successful desistance has been found to depend on identity transformation to the extent that Hunter and Farrall suggest '*a future self is the mechanism by which offenders can transcend situations of significant disadvantage that might favour further offending*' (Hunter and Farrall, 2017: 306).

The concept of 'restoration' recognises that, for most women in this study, the development of a secure sense of self had been distorted or eroded by experiences of trauma and abuse. It aims to emphasise that reframing a '*checkered past*' (Maruna, 2001: 39) into a new pro-social self-narrative is a significantly different task to making sense of stories of prolonged, repeated abuse to which the victim is unable to ascribe meaning. This theme comprised initial codes related to aspirations of conventionality, a desire for conformity, and seeking belonging<sup>20</sup>. However, when the women talked about 'feeling normal,' they also spoke of the ways in which their life stories and identities deviated from these norms. These narratives were dominated by feelings of shame, guilt, stigma, and marginalisation. Themes that were coded when the participants discussed these experiences included 'feeling isolated and excluded,' 'needing to hide,' 'self-blame,' 'not belonging,' 'false resilience,' 'never feeling comfortable,' 'self-harming,' and 'silencing themselves.' [see Appendices c(i-iii)].

This chapter explores the importance of coherent and conventional identities to the women's efforts to sustain desistance. It considers theories of identity transformation from the

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<sup>20</sup> Coded initially as 'feeling normal,' 'questioning identity,' 'feeling isolated,' and 'self-awareness.'



standpoint of women whose sense of self has been malformed and/or eroded by developmental or adult trauma and abuse. It begins by explaining ideas around identity transformation in the desistance literature and the extent to which these are reflected in this research. It considers the gendered dimensions of shame, stigma, and isolation that result from complex trauma, their impact on identity, and the implications for the women attempting to restore a sense of self during and after release from prison. The principal identity the women sought to embrace as an alternative to their stigmatised offender identities was that of 'mother.' Therefore, the chapter examines the accessibility of a 'good mother' identity to support the process of desistance. The analysis concludes that, more than adopting new roles or excavating a 'true self,' restoring a sense of self necessitates providing women with the opportunity to control how experiences of trauma interpose themselves into their self-narratives.

## 7.1 Identity transformation and desistance

As outlined in chapter two, secondary desistance requires that ex-offenders redefine themselves as law-abiding, productive members of society (Maruna and Roy, 2007). Whether the motivation is achieving an '*appealing and conventional*' replacement self (Giordano et al., 2002: 1001) or avoiding a '*feared self*' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009: 1106-1107), creating new self-narratives is presented in both the general desistance literature and research specifically on women's desistance as a factor that supports sustained desistance (Goodwin, 2016; Stone et al., 2016). The processes of identity transformation that have been shown to support desistance include the sociological concept of 'knifing off,' a process of separating the reformed self from past law-breaking (Laub and Sampson, 2003), and de-labelling, the affirmation of change from valued others (Farrall, 2005; Rumgay, 2004b; Veysey, Christian and Martinez, 2013). New narrative identities evidence reform, facilitate inclusion in conventional society (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014; McIvor et al., 2009), and relieve dissonance between past behaviour and more conventional, pro-social identities (Rumgay, 2004b). Through 'redemption scripts' (Maruna, 2001), ex-offenders establish narrative congruence, allowing past transgressions to be integrated into the story of an essentially 'good' self (Maruna, 2001).

There were examples of all of these processes in the way the women spoke about their identities. For example, many of the younger participants wanted to leave crime behind to avoid their 'feared self,' becoming a prison 'mum.'<sup>21</sup>

But it's definitely woken me up, it's made me realise that I don't want to be...you see people like that woman I just called, Mum, she's, what's, she's got to be about 50, ain't she? I don't want to be 50 and still bowling around the jail with a load of young offenders calling me, Mum, it's not the life I want (Ruby).

I'm 27 and I've been smoking since I was 15 and, like, the majority of the women I see in here, I've been seeing them now for 10, 15 years, they're all, like, in their 50s now and I'm a prideful person, like, I look around and I think, Janelle, really do you want to be 50 and be walking on the road selling yourself to finance a drug habit...(Janelle).

There were also some examples of redemption scripts within the women's narratives, though these tended to be isolated among the women with the least '*pathway luggage*' (Österman, 2018: 58) in that they were the least marginalised, had less entrenched offender identities, and the most opportunities available to construct prosocial selves<sup>22</sup>.

If anything I've had a lot of people say you actually inspire me, and that's humbling because I don't think I would have inspired anyone three, four years ago. Because, like I said, I didn't have a purpose, but now I feel like I have something to give. Yes, it's at the sacrifice of a criminal record and a tarnished name at the end of the day, but I don't think it's the be all and end all. It hasn't done me any badness. Like I said, I went to prison and I was there for a while, but I came out a better person. I think I had to lose everything, I had to lose my confidence and build it back up so that every day I'd work on being a better me (Frankie, FU2).

These women, like Frankie, were able integrate their offending into an overarching narrative that made sense of what they had done, redefining their offending as important to constructing a new and improved self, 'a better me.' They were able to reintegrate into society and be accepted back because they had, for most of their lives, been part of normal society. There was a place for them within it. The data presented in chapter five shows that for so many women in research, this was not their story. As a result of experiences of

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<sup>21</sup> The women in this study often defined their relationships to other prisoners in terms of family roles. Relationships between older women and younger women were often defined as 'mother/daughter' relationships.

<sup>22</sup> For example; Chloe, Dana, Erin, Michaela, Nicolette, Patsy, Yasmin

victimisation, harmful family environments, substance use, mental ill-health, they had always been marginalised.

The desistance literature acknowledges experiences of marginalisation, including experiences of abuse, which feature in stories of pathways to crime. However, these are presented as experiences to be transcended through the construction of a replacement or reformed self. The person repents for the deviant aspects of their character and presents them as critical to the reformed, 'true' self (Maruna, 2001). These perspectives imply that the fractured, negative, chaotic identity scripts that sustain harmful behaviour patterns result from the personal failure of the individual to correct their internal narratives. In response, some studies on women's desistance highlight the limited availability of acceptable narratives or replacement roles for criminalised women (Leverentz 2014; McCorkel, 2013; McIvor et al., 2009; Österman, 2018). Examining the women's narratives from a trauma perspective reveals further challenges to how desistance theories construct identity transformation. Rather than simply changing the script, for women in this study, re-biographing their narrative involved accepting what had happened *to* them and finding ways to cope with integrating these experiences into their self-concept.

## 7.2. The impact of trauma on identity formation

In common with the desistance theories, research on trauma-informed practice emphasizes the importance of narrative construction to identity coherence. Where the two diverge however is that trauma perspectives shine a spotlight on how trauma impacts on identity formation. Rather than redefining or reframing identity narratives to create a new self, the focus is on healing and restoring a damaged self (Herman, 1992/2015).

Developing a coherent sense of self depends on the individual's ability to integrate cognitive, affective, behavioural, and experiential aspects of their lives into a cohesive narrative. By definition, traumatic events are those that cannot be assimilated into the survivor's self-schema (van der Kolk, 2014). The previous chapter examined the extent of developmental trauma experienced by women in this research. Courtois and Ford (2016) state that the most

significant consequence of pervasive developmental trauma is its effect on the child's core sense of self and identity. In fact, both domestic and childhood abuse involve methods of psychological domination that are deliberately intended to destroy the victim's sense of self (Herman 1992/2015).

A key component of the trauma model of identity formation is dissociation. Dissociative experiences include dissociative amnesia (gaps in memory relating to experiences and the self), derealisation (sense of unreality, lack of continuity), depersonalisation (feeling disconnected from the body or emotions), identity alteration (split personality experiences), and identity confusion (inability to define the self) (Courtois and Ford, 2016; van der Kolk, 2014). These reveal trauma to impact not just on existential notions of identity, but on the self as embodied, a component of identity that is largely missing from the desistance research. Trauma survivors learn to use what Herman terms '*dissociative virtuosity*' (1992/2015: 102). These are elaborate dissociative strategies employed to survive prolonged victimisation. Jill's comments about how she copes with sex work/prostitution are an example of these strategies.

I don't feel good about myself, but it's a lifestyle you just adapt to. I use a different name. I pretend to be a different person, you know, just take on a role' (Jill).

Dissociative experiences enable trauma survivors to adapt to abusive environments, but can have profoundly damaging effects on the individual's sense of self (Herman, 1992/2015). Dissociation results in an incohesive self who, as examined in the previous chapter, is often unable to make the interpersonal connections necessary for personality development or experiences repeated disconnections that stifle psychological development (Covington, 2007; Williams, 2006). Psychological symptoms of dissociation can include diminished self-worth (Covington, 2007), affective and anxiety disorders, impulsivity, self-harm, addictions, and suicidality (Herman, 1992). Herman identified that under conditions of chronic abuse, dissociation becomes the central principle of personality organisation, '*preventing the normal integration of knowledge, memory, emotional states, and bodily experience to develop a cohesive self-image*' (Herman 1992/2015: 107; see also, Williams, 2006).

In her diagnostic criteria for complex PTSD, Herman (1992/2015) identifies alterations in self-perception that resonate with how the women spoke about their 'selves' and their ability to transform 'spoiled' identities into pro-social, non-offender identities. She identified that the self-perception of survivors of chronic trauma was characterised by '*a sense of helplessness or paralysis of initiative, shame, guilt, and self-blame, a sense of defilement or stigma, and a sense of complete difference from others*' (Herman 1992/2015: 121).

This chapter will now examine how these self-perceptions played out in the identity narratives of the women in this study and the implications for understanding and supporting women's efforts to desist from crime.

### 7.3. Shame, stigma, and marginalised identities

Shame was a dominant feature of the women's evaluations of their experiences and behaviour. Tangney and Dearing (2003:18) define shame as '*an acutely painful emotion that is typically accompanied by a sense of shrinking or 'being small' and by a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness.*' In contrast to desistance-supporting identity narratives, shame comprises negative self-evaluations that reflect not just 'bad behaviour' but a spoilt identity unworthy of acceptance and belonging (Brown, 2006; Gilbert and Andrews, 1998; Lewis, 1995; Matos, Pinto-Gouveia and Duarte, 2012). As such, shame erodes an individual's sense of who they are and their ability to view themselves positively. High levels of shame are therefore a potential obstacle to the positive self-evaluation required for successful desistance.

Extensive clinical research evidences that victimisation in childhood can adversely affect personality development and manifest as symptoms which include self-loathing and the perception of the self as permanently damaged (Courtois and the DTD Field Trial Work Group, 2011 cited in Courtois and Ford, 2016). The abused person's identity is formed around a perception of their inner 'badness.' This persists into adulthood as survivors of repeated abuse internalise the abuser's declarations that they are responsible for their victimization, often reinforced by patriarchal constructions of violence against women.

Consequently, a symptom of complex trauma is the development of a contaminated, stigmatised identity (Herman 1992/2015).

With few exceptions (for example, Hamilton, 2016), where shame is discussed in the desistance literature, it is typically presented as a moral arbiter that can motivate self-change (Farrall, 2005). This has little resonance with how the women in this study experienced shame. Edina was a glamour model and hostess prior to her offence. She described her lifestyle as 'a shameful thing.' She had not spoken to anyone about how she was earning money, as she explained;

I feel like if my family ever found out about the true me, they'll be ashamed, seriously (Edina).

Her offending intensified this shame,

I think everything is just twice as bad now. I just feel ugly, I feel worthless...I feel like if people really knew me, like they would know that I am an ugly person (Edina).

Edina's comments exemplify how deeply shame erodes self-esteem and casts a shadow over the women's perceptions of themselves. In addition, they illustrate how shame has emotional, cognitive, and reflexive components (Gilbert and Andrews, 1998). Emotional responses of self-hatred or feeling worthless interact with cognitions about the self as inferior or damaged in the eyes of others. These culminate in self-critique, 'If people really knew me they would know I am an ugly person' (Edina).

Shame emanates from the exposure of negative aspects of the self, resulting in an inability to create desirable images of ourselves in the eyes of others and the threat of social rejection (Matos et al., 2012; Hernandez and Mendoza, 2011; van Vliet, 2008). The women's negative self-evaluations could not be detached from their sense of being rejected by family, friends, or others in the community. Catherine spoke of having to 'sell' herself when speaking to her extended family. She would pretend everything was going well to discourage them from seeing her as a 'criminal.'

And I feel like I've got to keep this persona up of being a good person...Because I suppose that's who I want to be, you want to be liked, you want people to think nice things of you, and when the reality of it is you do some pretty awful things (Catherine, initial interview).

Whilst desistance commentators place an onus on the community to accept the ex-offender back, the individual has to become sufficiently robust and confident in their 'new self' to receive the acceptance (McNeill, 2012). Shame can impede this process as the person is left believing they are unworthy of belonging (Brown, 2006). From the ruins of a shamed self, it is difficult to lay the foundations of a positive self-concept on which to restore a non-offender identity.

### 7.3.1. Shame and gender: Embodied stigma and identity

Brown (2006: 46) describes the '*shame web*' to illustrate how psychological, social, and cultural elements interweave to create shame, based on narrow socio-cultural interpretations of appropriate behaviour which necessarily incorporate normative constructions of what it means to be a woman. The context in which women experience shame is inextricably linked to their real or perceived failure to meet these expectations (Hamilton, 2016). Amy captures this idea when talking about how ashamed she feels when she sees other women behaving how she used to,

They really behave obscenely, not like a young lady should behave. They're like, oh, give us this, give us that, can I have that....Their attitudes are so corrupted, they want everything and think they can take anything off anyone. And to think that's what I used to be like makes me sick to the pit of my stomach. Looking at them now and how everyone else in reality sees them. Oh my God. It's what I used to be like. And then it's the sheer shock and horror from what I used to be (Amy, initial interview)

Here Janelle talks about how experiences of domestic violence shattered her self-esteem. Her emotional response to her experiences is explicitly gendered, defined by her shame at failing to meet expectations of womanhood. Her comments also show that poor self-esteem can increase susceptibility to shame.

Domestic violence is one thing, yeah, it takes away your self-esteem as a woman, especially like, I've had a few miscarriages due to domestic violence, you know, you feel like you're not worth being a woman, like no-one is ever going to love you, you don't, like, you don't ever feel pretty, you can have all the expensive make-up in the world, I could be standing next to Britney Spears and look better than her but still feel ugly. Like, you just don't feel like you belong, you're never comfortable, no matter where you're at, prestige house, you just don't feel at home (Janelle).

Hamilton (2016) has noted how shame for men trying to leave crime behind is linked to failures to live up to gendered ideals of hegemonic masculinity. Janelle's comments illustrate that, for women, shame is not only gendered, but also sexed in that it is an embodied experience. At its most profound, the women talked about aspects of themselves as inhuman. Katy evoked images of 'a monster' to describe how she perceives herself and how she is perceived by others when she drinks,

But this is a Jekyll and Hyde episode, when I have a drink, I turn into something I don't like. So I am a kind of monster. And I've been told about that, some kind of monster (Katy).

Alyssa was convicted of involvement in a sexual offence, the most reviled of offences, particularly for female perpetrators. She feels she is being depicted as a 'monster' and 'horrific.' To counteract this stigma she is desperate to distinguish who she is from what she did.

They've painted a picture of me to be this monster, this horrific person. I'm going to come out of prison. I'm going to be a high risk to society, like...it's just really horrible. I want to be able to show these people that, look, like whatever it is that you accuse me of doing, I'm not that person (Alyssa).

Desistance studies have positioned the development of pro-social identities as a way to deflect stigma (LeBel et al., 2008), but lack in-depth examination of the relationship between stigma and identity. The women's depictions of their 'real me' or 'true self' were often characterised by stigma rather than '*underlying decency*' (Maruna, 2001: 89). This was conveyed in the physicality of their depictions of shame. Edina and Janelle express it as 'ugliness.' Jill talked about her involvement in prostitution as 'a dirty life,' suggesting she feels visibly soiled by her experiences. Versions of the word 'disgust' were used by many of the participants to express shame related to past experiences and/or their offending. For example, when Abi spoke about the prevalence of her offending, she described it as 'disgusting, absolutely disgusting.' Amy describes feeling physically sick. Alyssa and Katy carry such stigmatised identities that they feel like monsters. The physicality of the women's descriptions seemed a particularly gendered response to shame and stigma.



Some behaviours were both a cause and consequence of stigma. Compulsive self-injury is strongly associated with a history of prolonged repeated trauma (Connors, 1996; van der Kolk, Perry and Herman, 1991). Self-harm was described as a way of coping with negative self-judgements, whilst intensifying feelings of stigma. Here Alice talks about her response to having been raped on three different occasions.

I used to hate myself. I used to self-harm my face. That's why I've got scars on my face...It's been related to drug use and from being raped, because I didn't want to be pretty anymore, so I take drugs and then after when I'm a bit drowsy, then I'll start self-harming my face. That's why I've got lots of scars on my face, and I think it woke me up as well coming to prison, not being able to have foundation, not being able to have make-up, because I haven't got anything to cover my scars so every day I've got to face what's happened and what I've done (Alice).

Alice's shame is evident. She talks of hating herself (as opposed to her abuser) and of not wanting to be pretty anymore. The implication being that her victimisation is her fault. The physicality in expressions of shame detailed above re-emerge in Alice's account. She physically harms herself to make herself ugly. This is a way of coping with the shame of having been repeatedly raped but becomes itself a source of stigma; a physical sign of 'what's happened and what I've done.'

The dissociation and fragmentation of identity highlighted in the research as a response to developmental trauma is evident in the narratives of the women in this study. Traumatized people who cannot spontaneously dissociate may attempt to produce similar numbing effects with drugs and alcohol (Herman 1992/2015). Substance misuse performed similar functions to self-harm. It temporarily alleviated feelings of shame, as Rina explains,

I'd walked out on my kids, I'd walked out on everything. The burden of carrying so much guilt, I just smoked to get rid of it (Rina).

However, in the longer term, it reinforced shame and stigma.

The drug kind of, at first makes you feel superior and then you kind of, makes yourself feel inferior (Charlene).

Maeve and Jill were also aware that their need for drugs led to behaviour of which they were ashamed.

I used to like, dip<sup>23</sup> and take people's handbags and I feel disgusted with that ...I could never do that if I was abstinent, I couldn't do that (Maeve).

Sometimes I didn't even know what I'm doing. I'm so out of my box but yes, you know, it's a dirty life and I don't want to be doing it (Jill)

'Branded,' 'embarrassed,' 'stigmatized,' 'shameful,' these were just some of the words the women used when talking about how they experience the perceptions of others.

Once you come to prison, that's it, you're branded a certain way in the community. And it's not a good brush to be branded with (Misha).

The sense of having some sort of physical marker of 'deviance' that was prevalent in the pre-release interviews remained a feature of the women's post-release experiences, leaving them feeling paranoid and insecure.

I feel like the whole world's watching me, as if I've got this big thing saying just been released from prison (Jane, FU1)

I'll never live it down and no matter what I do, no matter how much I can turn my life around, my past is always going to be there, no matter what. And I hate it (Janine, FU1).

This distinction between who one is and what one has done is represented in the majority of the theories as the distinction between shame and guilt (see for example, Tangney and Dearing, 2003; Lewis, 1995). In contrast to shame, guilt does not impact on the individual's self-concept as there is condemnation of the behaviour rather than of the whole self (Tangney and Dearing, 2003; Gilbert and Andrews, 1998). This reflects previous shame research with women that has revealed feeling trapped, powerless, and isolated as central to how women experience shame, and resonates with research on the impact of trauma on self-perception (Brown, 2006; Herman, 1992/2015; Tangney and Dearing, 2003; Van Vliet, 2008). Hernandez and Mendoza (2012) report that women consistently report higher levels of shame than guilt and that shame is compounded when, as exemplified in this research, women internalise the shame society casts on those who violate gender expectations. The

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<sup>23</sup> Slang term for pickpocket

challenge for supporting women's desistance is that whilst the research indicates guilt can produce positive reparative action such as confession, apology, or restitution, characteristic of how identity transformation is presented in most desistance research, shame tends to elicit destructive responses. Research has shown that shame can convert into feelings of depression, anger, and a desire to escape or hide. It can also be disruptive to interpersonal relationships and social interactions (Tangney and Dearing, 2003; Lewis 1995; Herman, 1992/2015). None of these responses support the construction of a new positive self-concept deemed so important to desistance.

### 7.3.3. Marginalised identities

The women sought to overcome feelings of shame and stigma by 'achieving normality.' Pursuing conventionality explained some of their past behaviours and their aspirations for the future.

I thought to myself that I wasn't normal, due to being in care. And a lot of people knew about me having two mums and then this...like, all my situation, basically. And I just wanted to say I am normal, you know what I mean, but deep down I think I knew, yes, I am doing it because of this. Because I'm not stupid, I know...what I'm doing with myself, but at the time I think it was more of a brave face and just to forget about things, and be like any normal child, you know. Some of them that was in the group were in the same situation as me, some of them had been care or they had problems...they wanted to feel normal or around people that were in the same boat, basically (Abi).

Abi's comments capture how insecurity in her sense of self was related to her pathway into crime. In seeking to 'be like any normal child,' she attached herself to others who were also marginalised which, paradoxically, resulted in behaviours that consolidated their outsider status. Abi's experiences reflect a common feature of the women's struggles to create a coherent narrative identity. They expressed an awareness of their distorted understandings of normality and of the dissonance between how they experienced their lives and how they are perceived by others.

This dissonance between played out in Pamela's assumptions about how I would judge her life.

Pamela: But I've never really looked deep into why I done what I done. Not really. It's just a way of life. To you it might not seem normal, but to me it's normal.

Madeline: Yeah, I understand that.

Pamela: To you obviously you think something's definitely wrong, but to me it's normal. If I was in front of a psychologist you'd say well, it was something definitely deep rooted in my childhood why I turned out the way I did, but to me, I don't see nothing wrong. I see myself as a normal person.

Learning what normality is and how to achieve it has been identified as a primary cognitive task for women in the process of desisting (Leverentz, 2014: 37). Kitt's experience illustrates how formidable this task is against a backdrop of childhood trauma.

So I saw the dysfunction when I was maybe about 11 or 12, just before I went to secondary school; watched my dad pour faeces and urine over my mum's head – the smell still stays with me – but I wasn't really brought up dysfunctional but there was things that weren't normal, but it was normal, if you understand what I mean, for me it was normal. From a young age I thought to myself that prostitution was a good way of making money, from a young age, I really did (Kitt).

As Kitt's comments illustrate, both experiencing and witnessing prolonged abusive behaviours in childhood distorts the women's sense of normality to the point that their sense of identity is characterised by confusion and instability, rather than coherence. This was reiterated by several other women including Alyssa,

I sit here sometimes and I wonder to myself, if I was to do this outside will my friends think that I'm okay? Would they think that I'm crazy? (Alyssa)

Miriam also powerfully captured what it feels like to try to restore a sense of coherence to a fractured identity in the aftermath of chronic trauma.

You are trying to take the pieces out and put the puzzle back together and its hard (Miriam, initial interview).

To extend her metaphor, the women are attempting to recreate an image they cannot clearly see.

A few of the women used very literal examples to express how they hid the aspects of their identities that exposed them to negative judgements in order to fit in. Catherine, for example, described 'chameleoning' herself to explain how she would change her identity to become who she perceived those with whom she was interacting wanted her to be. Rebecca, when talking about overcoming the shame of addiction said,

I'm just gonna...let myself be, with everybody again instead of just being this fake person, I guess. Not fake, just camouflaged I guess (Rebecca).

In their desire to create a coherent identity the selves the women sought to construct were highly conventional, based on home, education, and self-development.

I'm quite a nice person anyway when I don't do anything bad so I'll just be at home and just be mooching at my house and my flat, and just spend time with my family and children and working, just fitting into normal society. It's a dream but so much I wish that I could be like normal people... (Alice).

I just want to start again...go to college, go to training, sort out everything. Yeah, just like normal. That's it. I can cook. I can clean, I can do all that, it's just me, going to college (Natalie).

I don't mean to blow my own trumpet but I'm a very intelligent girl, you know what I mean. I've got GCSEs, NVQs, I've got certificates that are recognized. I know that I can get work or I could study. You know, I've got time to change my life, I've got time to get a career. And later on in life I'd like to have a family. Not now, I can't look after myself at the minute. But you know what I mean, I want a proper life (Abi).

Becoming normal was presented by the women as a way to restore a sense of self. Despite their stated lack of clarity about what 'normality' is, it was depicted as significant to their desistance in a number of ways. The women often framed their offending as resulting from a sense of being abnormal. They tried to hide this by associating with others who were marginalised and engaging in behaviour that further isolated them. Or deviance was normalised to the extent that they were unable to make informed judgements or decisions about their lives. They expressed confusion about whether 'abnormal,' offending-related behaviours were understandable responses to specific situations or evidence of innate 'badness.' They desired conventionality and presented aspects of their character that they

felt evidenced their ordinariness. They were desperately seeking to pass as conventional women yet bore the physical, emotional, and psychological scars of their extra-ordinary lives.

## 7.4. Restoring the self after release

All the women involved in the follow up sessions spoke of difficulty sustaining any progress they had made on constructing new identities in prison after release. Among both the women who were sustaining desistance and those who returned to prison, their sense of self remained fractured and dissonant, characterised by shame and stigma. Catherine had worked as peer mentor in prison. This had positively impacted on her self-confidence and reflexivity, however she struggled to sustain this on release.

I'm just totally lost. When I first came out I was, like, yes, I know what I want, I know where I'm going...And, I've just, kind of, fallen back into trying to please everyone else, and not being myself again, my priorities are all wrong...my sense of self has gone again, Holloway makes you be yourself, you come out and you think, what the fuck happened there! (Catherine, FU1).

Back in prison on new charges, Rina also spoke of feeling lost after release.

So I'm lost and now I haven't got all the...like in here I've got so much support or people, there's distraction, out there I'm on my own you know, so it's a big difference (Rina, FU1).

Prison provides the support, structure, and security through which the women can try out new identities. Catherine took on a responsible, prestigious, advisory role within the prison which allowed her self-esteem and assertiveness to grow. Rina, off drugs and away from the dangers of her life on the streets could enjoy feeling part of a group in which she was respected and well-liked by staff and other women. Neither Rina nor Catherine enjoyed prison, but prison did provide a space for them to learn about themselves and how they could be different. They could be sober, knowledgeable, respected, innovative, and pro-active. They could learn something about their potential, as Victoria also explained,

It's just like, you know when you see...it's like people see potential in you. You see it in yourself (Victoria, FU1).

This self-affirming reflection was, however, unavailable to them on release. Sustaining a new identity following release from prison was impeded by intense stigma, shame, and guilt that re-emerged as they attempted to reintegrate into society.

The women were able to envisage ridding themselves of the labels associated with criminality after release through adopting different roles. By far the most salient in relation to their identities and self-concepts was motherhood. This was raised spontaneously by all the women in the cohort who had children as a role and identity that could counteract the shame, stigma, and marginalisation of their offending and imprisonment.

## 7.5. Motherhood, identity, and desistance.

The preceding chapter examined the women's relationships with their children and how these can both support and complicate efforts to desist. An additional function of motherhood in relation to desistance is the opportunity it presents to construct an identity that separates the woman from her involvement in crime. Motherhood remains a venerated identity for women. It is the identity most deeply intertwined with the biological, emotional, sociological, and psychological constructions of womanhood (Nakano Glenn, 1994/2016; Wellton, 1988). The positivity in this identity makes it an attractive alternative to the negative identities carried by many women in the justice system.

This research challenges the universalism of the 'mommy myth' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004), noting that mothering experiences for women on the margins of society rarely conform to its idealisations, yet the myth is powerful. As Sutherland (2010) argues, the current model of motherhood that demands physical, emotional, psychological, and intellectual sacrifice of the self is almost impossible to achieve, yet women have to be seen to conform or face social censure.

The imperative to conform to normative standards of mothering is reinforced by the justice system. It has long been suggested that women who are married and who have primary

caring responsibility for children receive greater leniency from the Court (Doerner and Demuth, 2014). However, several commentators (for example, Daly, 1989; Hedderman and Gelsthorpe, 1997; Kennedy, 1992) have observed that motherhood is accepted as a mitigating factor only when the mothers conform to white, middle class norms of good mothering. Mothers with mental health problems, addictions, mothers involved in sex work/prostitution, with children in care, lesbian mothers, and BAME mothers' failure to fulfil these stereotypes becomes related to their risk of recidivism and consequently a factor in their harsher treatment by the Courts.

This study highlights how motherhood creates opportunities for justice involved women to foster new identities, but that this '*reorientation of the self*' (Wright et al., 2013: 1043) is far from inevitable. Shame, stigma, and isolation tarnish their identities as mothers as they do other aspects of their selves.

This chapter will now examine motherhood identities through the desistance process by examining motherhood identities prior to imprisonment, when in prison, and on release into the community.

### 7.5.1 Motherhood identities prior to imprisonment

For many of the mothers in this research, the opportunity to use motherhood to nurture an alternative identity was complicated by their experiences of motherhood prior to their incarcerations. Using their roles as mothers as a means of supporting desistance did not simply involve replacing one identity (offender) with another (mother). Instead, the transition was from 'bad mother' to 'good mother.'

Motherhood has high status as an identity (Ferraro and Moe, 2003) so, naturally, the women in this study were keen to present themselves as good mothers.

We used to do lots of things outside anyway. And, like if it was raining, I used to get him to get play-doh out, paint out, I was a proactive mum with him...I've got assessments to do because they [Children and Family Services] said there's not a problem with my parenting, I'm a good mum and things like that. They were shocked when they found out I was using drugs...Like, I've never harmed my kids, never hit my



kids, never done nothing like that. It's the people I choose to have in my life and the lifestyle around me, that's what they say, not me being a mother, not a problem (Charlene).

Maternal mythology does not allow for motherhood to be a problem and here, Charlene is able to psychologically separate her mothering from all the other 'problems' in her life in order to assert her conformity to standards of good mothering. However, the women also felt the stigma of being labelled a 'bad mother' as a result of raising children in situations which do not conform to such standards. One example repeated by many was the experience of mothering in an abusive relationship. Adriana was in prison for failing to protect her daughter who had been physically abused by the child's father, Adriana's ex-partner.

The whole thing started from domestic abuse. And it involved my little girl and they done me for failing to protect her...and it's the worst thing in the world that I've been put in here for something someone else has done, not from something I've done. And like everyone's made me feel like a bad mother (Adriana).

The pressure to conform to traditional notions of good mothering and family life, and avoid the shame of having failed as a mother, meant many of the women and their children were in dangerous situations, as epitomised by Jane's experience.

I wanted to leave but when I was being brought up, I was brought up that a child should have a mam and a dad so I stayed and I endured everything I endured to give (my son) his stable relationship. The only reason I left was because he assaulted me this one night and I went into premature labour and had my twins and one of them died after half an hour and one died after an hour and a half, and that's when I left. If (my son) hadn't been there, I would have gone a lot sooner but it was because I believed a child needs a mam and a dad (Jane, initial interview).

These abusive relationships occasionally resulted in the loss of children, either as a direct result of the abuse, as in the case of Jane's premature births, or by having the children permanently removed from their care, as in Adriana's case; the ultimate indictment of having failed as a mother (see also, Stone, 2015). Failing this crucial test of womanhood, many of the women in the study had internalised the narrative of them as unfit mothers. Depression, self-

doubt, and guilt pervade the accounts of the women's lives following the loss of their children.

And I do, like, hate myself for it because if I'd acted on it sooner, then maybe none of this would have happened...I feel partly to blame for it because if I knew then what I know now, he wouldn't have been part of her life. But I've let him be there and this has happened to her. And that has sort of put me off having any more children. So like if I don't have children, I can't let anyone else down (Adriana).

Far from being an opportunity to create an alternative identity and a means of supporting desistance, motherhood to Adriana was a risk. The consequences were so immense that she felt unable to ever be a mother again. For Adriana, Jane, and Alice, their ability to be 'good mums' had been damaged by their experiences of having been abused by those they were relying on to parent with them. Contrary to offering a stable, safe, fulfilling identity, their experiences of motherhood had been characterised by danger, guilt, and grief.

It was notable how many of the women had become mothers at a young age. This presents them with further challenges in proving themselves to be good mothers. As Sharpe (2015) argues, teenage motherhood has come to be the dominant discourse of *problem* motherhood.

...people failed to notice that during the time I was going through all those things, I was heavily pregnant. I was 18 years of age. They took my child away from me from hospital. I suffered from post-natal depression. No-one cared about that. It was all about the crime I committed. I haven't had chance to grieve for my son properly and then I come to prison (Alyssa).

Women internalise the assumptions that they somehow innately understand how to be good mothers regardless of their experiences. This leaves them ill-equipped to deal with the challenges of looking after a child or to cope with the sense of failure when they encounter difficulties. As Natalie discovered;

I thought I could do it, but I needed help. And I don't think I got that help and support that I needed, do you know? It's a bit hard. I was nineteen. I had my first child at nineteen (Natalie).

Experiences of abuse, immaturity, and having few or no models of adequate parenting all impacted on the availability of motherhood as an alternative identity that could support desistance. Related to all of these experiences were the struggles many of the women had managing substance misuse and mental health problems alongside motherhood.

As a result of experiences of trauma and abuse, several of the women had entered motherhood whilst experiencing substance dependency and mental health problems. Both pose challenges to being a good mother and both manifest as symptoms of having failed as a mother (McCorkel, 2013; Stone, 2016). By the age of eighteen Rina had two children and was pregnant with a third. Rina experienced an extremely chaotic and unstable childhood characterised by periods in care resulting from her frequently running away from home. She started using drugs at the age of ten and became sexually active at the age of twelve.<sup>24</sup> She managed to terminate her drug use during her pregnancies but following problems in her relationship with the father of the third child, she relapsed.

I think I suffered post-natal depression because I just couldn't cope. I just couldn't cope. I was doing everything I didn't want to do. I was smoking crack really bad. I'd take the kids to nursery and I needed crack so I'd smoke all day, he'd be at work, I'd collect the kids late and things were getting chaotic in my life. Basically I walked out on the family because of things like suffering post-natal depression. Maybe it's an excuse, I don't know. But when I done that, a lot of guilt came in and I just started taking drugs really hard. I abandoned my home. My big son was placed with his dad. The two kids were put in care because my dad couldn't manage... (Rina, initial interview).

Rina's inability to tolerate feelings of guilt is reflected in Silva, Pires, Guerreiro and Cardoso's (2013) study which revealed motherhood for women with addictions to be characterised by contradictory feelings of despair, anxiety, and hope resulting in a cycle of feelings of guilt about lapses and relapses. The constant oscillation between these states makes it difficult for mothers with addictions to stick to the motherhood 'script' (Rumgay, 2004b: 411).

Motherhood as an identity is only useful as a route to desistance if women can be validated as 'good enough' mothers (Winnicott, 1971/2005). Early, unplanned, and single motherhood, welfare dependency, offending, substance misuse, mental ill-health, abusive relationships,

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<sup>24</sup> Rina does not define this as abuse.

and having children in care are all characteristic of problematic motherhood. Motherhood comes to women in the context of their lives yet idealised constructions of motherhood leave no room for the mothers' experiences to impact on their ability to be good mothers (Sharpe, 2015; Stone, 2016). According to the mythology, the joy of motherhood should be sufficient to overcome any past adversity. These forced and unrealistic constructions of motherhood only intensify the sense of failure experienced by mothers in prison and complicate the relationship between motherhood and desistance.

### 7.5.2. Motherhood identities in prison

Women bring the multitude of mothering experiences described above into custody with them. For some, prison is an opportunity to reflect on their roles as mothers, to plan for their families' futures, to seek purpose in their mothering responsibilities, and can consequently help to reaffirm their identities as mothers (Baldwin, 2015).

In this study, several participants were able to reframe prison and separation from children as a sacrifice for the good of their children. They internalise judgements of themselves as unfit mothers, repeating like a mantra that they are not in the right place to be able to care for their children. So 'good mothering' becomes accepting that their children are better off in the care of others.

If you've got problems and you're not dealing with them how can you be there for your child?...If you can't look after yourself mentally and physically how can you expect to look after your child? You can love a child all you like but I could have been neglecting her in other ways like emotionally neglecting her or not being there for her because I am so in my own problems (Lucy).

Lucy's comments reveal how prison for some mothers can act as a space in which they can redefine their motherhood identities away from the pressures of everyday survival (Granja et al, 2014). There is an uncertainty in Lucy's tone here. She can see why she could be deemed to have failed at motherhood, but also knows all the ways in which she succeeded, creating a sense of incohesion around her identity as a mother.

As Granja et al. (2014) highlight, prison prevents the basic practices associated with motherhood such as care, discipline, providing for, and educating your child. As Lady Hale

noted, '*To be a prisoner is almost by definition to become a bad mother*' (Hale, cited in Corston, 2007: 2).

Chloe was five months pregnant when we spoke. She was serving a four month sentence for her first offence. Her identity as a mother had been thrown into turmoil by her incarceration. Firstly, she described feeling the acute stigma of being a both a mother *and* a prisoner.

I went to hospital yesterday in handcuffs. You go to hospital and it's like you've murdered twenty people, that's what people look at you like, and I'm just a normal person...My midwife from outside who I have never actually met has phoned my family to tell them she is going to social services over what she's read in the newspaper, so she's judged me completely on what she's read and having never met me. So even though people say, oh no, I don't judge, everybody judges.

Chloe objected to the judgment of others, but was aware that she had internalized the shame of being pregnant and being an 'offender.'

Even being on bail, before I came in here, even though people don't know, you feel like people know. I don't think it's anything anyone wants.

Chloe sensed the stigma of imprisonment for mothers was different to that of fathers in prison.

If a man goes to prison, the woman is there to pick up the whole family. But I don't think if a woman goes to prison, a man can do everything and that might be a bit sexist but I just think women are different to men and need different things.

Chloe also experienced how prison would impact on the identity she had constructed around herself as a mother in more practical ways.

The hardest thing is that they've taken me out of two jobs where I would have been paid full maternity pay, and now I'm going to leave prison, heavily pregnant without being able to get any maternity pay and because my partner works, I can't sign on or anything like that so for the next year I'm just a bit stuffed... For me to go from being very much a shared, between me and my partner, everything shared to now he's going to pay for everything and I'm going to be a stay at home mum isn't at all what I wanted.

Chloe's explains the gender differences in how prison impacts parental identity. As Chloe points out, a father in prison is unlikely to suffer the same stigma or find himself forced into a dependent, subordinated role within the family. Chloe's story illustrates how prison can impact on narratives of motherhood for even those women with the most stable and conventional lives prior to their incarceration. Other women, much more numerous, are attempting to navigate motherhood from prison in the face of much more complex life circumstances.

Against the backdrop of lost, removed, troubled children and stigmatised, unstable, monitored parenting, the women could reassure themselves of not having entirely failed as mothers by reflecting on the successes of their children.

My daughter's 22 and my son's 21 now so they'll be grown up, and they're working. They don't touch drugs or nothing, so it's good...I'm happy with them because they're doing so well. So yeah, they've done alright for themselves (Carla, initial interview).

Succeeding as a mother was perceived whilst the women were in custody as motivation to desist from offending on release. Prison afforded the women space to reflect on their roles as mothers and on how embracing motherhood could help them overcome the difficulties that had contributed to their involvement in the criminal justice system. Shamaï and Kochal (2008: 327) recognised this in their research as motherhood becoming the women's '*motive for survival*' whilst in custody; what they termed '*fantasies*' of good motherhood that were a means for the women to cognitively manage otherwise intolerable emotional distress (see also, Stone, 2016).

For some, their time in prison could be justified if they make their children their focus on release. Elishima and Charlene framed their experiences in this way in order to forgive themselves and plan for the future.

The separation is very hard, but at the same time when they go all the time there's a thing for me where I say okay then, I can get out and do something better for them...I know they're alright so I don't worry too much, but at the same time I need to get out and do something positive for them (Elishima).

I can say to my kids eventually, like, yeah, I did go to jail, this is why I went to jail, this is what it was for but I've done this, boom, boom, boom (Charlene).

From prison, the women's conceptions of motherhood post-release hover between the routine 'just wanting to be there' for their children and grand idealised visions of selflessness and devotion. On a basic level, the women spoke of their children as an incentive to avoid further involvement with the criminal justice system. Kitt describes what many of the women expressed; a sense that despite all the harmful experiences in their lives, their children were a reason to keep surviving and keep trying to improve their lives.

Rape, domestic violence, prostitution; these were the things that made my life dysfunctional. Being homeless on the street. I've tried to kill myself. When you've thought of having no purpose, then what am I supposed to do. But God is good, he's given me my purpose back...I gave [my children] life to look after them and...that gives me purpose to work and do something proper that's not going to put them at risk of any neglect from me. There's so much reasons to live now, but before I couldn't see it (Kitt).

Kitt's comments present motherhood as a fairly straightforward means of reframing her life and priorities. For other women, like Casey, their connection to their identities as mothers was more insecure, more entangled with their experiences of abuse, substance misuse, mental health issues, and potential risk to their families. For these reasons, Casey thought it best she stay on the periphery of her children's lives.

I think I'll leave them where they're at. They've got a little stable structured lifestyle with my mum and dad and I think I'd fuck it up at the beginning, but after a year then yeah, of course, but for now, no (Casey).

Many of the women needed to believe they would have the opportunity, once released, to take up their role as mothers and that this focus would ensure they did not come back to prison. This determination was evident even in cases where such expectations were going to be impossible to realise.

Alyssa's son was adopted during her sentence.

...after I've got myself sorted financially and I've got a home and everything, that's when I can go and try and fight for [my son] because it doesn't make sense me coming out whilst I'm still unstable to try and fight for him...(Alyssa)

Alyssa's attachment to her motherhood identity was echoed by other women who cited their children as a purpose that would help them change their lives even if they were no longer in their care. Adriana's daughter had also been adopted, but being ready for her to return was motivating Adriana to avoid further offending.

I want to do well when I'm out because I want her to be able to come back and...make her proud like and not think I've thrown my life away because I've lost her (Adriana).

Adriana and Alyssa show explicitly what was evident in many of the women's reflections on motherhood after release; that their identities as mothers are not dependent on them having contact with their children. Many of the women did not have direct or regular input into their children's lives but nevertheless clung to their identities as mothers.

### 7.5.3. Motherhood identities post-release

The salience of motherhood to the female identity meant that few of the women could conceive of an identity that was not in some way shaped by their roles as mothers. From behind the prison walls they allow themselves to envisage themselves on the outside as part of a happy, functional family, but these dreams are tempered by the realities of what the women need to overcome to achieve this (Brown and Bloom, 2009).

Even the strongest relationships between mothers and their children are likely to be damaged by prison. In order for motherhood to be embraced on release as an identity that can support desistance, this damage has to be repaired. The shame, stigma, and isolation many of the women had faced in engaging with their identities as mothers both prior to and during imprisonment means this route to desistance is littered with obstacles. As Brown and Bloom highlight, '*motherhood at the margins of social and economic life is...fraught with potential failure, given the immense challenges that greet women once the prison door closes behind them*' (2009: 313).

Adult children can decide to terminate or limit contact with mothers returning from prison at any point. This brought an instability to the mother/adult child relationship post-release. Mothers of younger children also experienced precariousness in their motherhood role after



release. Catherine's experience serves as a case study of the challenges faced by ex-prisoners reassuming the mothering role after release.

Catherine was released to what would be considered an ideal family situation.

My husband's a social worker, I'm working, keeping the house, I had all the kids. It looked wicked on paper (Catherine, FU1).

Soon after release, Catherine became aware that her mothering was under increased surveillance. When Catherine returned to work, she discovered someone had reported her to Children and Family Services.

When I found out that they'd phoned safeguarding, it was like my first real thingy of coming home, do you know what I mean, no-one's actually said anything to me – oh my daughter can't come to your house because you've been to prison. I've never heard any of that, I haven't put myself in situations where I can get that. But then actually hearing that, I was like...God (Catherine, FU1).

The enormity of the potential consequences of this were difficult for Catherine to articulate. Her expression becomes very disjointed and is littered with unfinished sentences as she reflects on the possible repercussions.

Do you know what I mean, imagine if the safeguarding team had gone, oh you can't have that, do you know what I mean, or, you know. Where would I be now...Imagine, God. And my manager is so nice to me, and I think like, god, do you know what I mean, I am so lucky. Because if I was like, if it had gone an ounce the other way, then where would I be now (Catherine, FU1).

The stigma of being a mother who has been in prison reproduces the feelings of shame, guilt, and marginalisation that were apparent in the women's depictions of their mothering experiences prior to imprisonment.

I think it's got worse, for me...It's like, in the playground, it's different now, with the new set of mums. It's still like, everyone is really judgemental, and you can see some parents, they used to go, like, oh come to the PTA and everything. And I think, now they know, they're like, oh....My daughter's having a birthday, and a sleepover, and I was like, what if the parents don't let her come (Catherine, FU2).

By our final session, Catherine's marriage had broken down, her husband had moved out, and she had been through a custody battle for her children. She won this, but the experience meant she spent many months fearing the court's judgement of her mothering and the loss of her children. Her experience is an illustration of how there has been an over-simplification of what is meant by the 'mother' identity and its relationship to desistance. Catherine succeeded. She remains out of prison at the time of writing. But resuming her motherhood identity post-release was characterised as much by shame, stigma, and isolation as by pride and purpose.

Motherhood offers much of what desistance requires; a positive identity, hope, a focus, an opportunity for redemption (Maruna, 2001; Stone, 2016). But, as Brown and Bloom (2009) point out, the motherhood script women are expected to follow was not written with justice involved women in mind. Enacting this identity in a way that meets acceptable standards presents considerable challenges for many women in the justice system and can aggravate feelings of stigma, shame, marginalisation, and failure. Ideally motherhood brings with it unique opportunities for women to develop replacement identities. However, all too often, the experiences that have contributed to the women being in conflict with the law means motherhood becomes another experience in their lives over which they have no autonomy. They are perceived as 'risky' mothers. The State, rather than nurturing the motherhood identity as motivation to change their lives, deals with it as a site in need of regulation (Opsal 2015). Being allowed to mother becomes a privilege rather than a right (Ferraro and Moe, 2003; Brown and Bloom, 2009). Decisions about their ability to care for their children are taken by others. The message that they have no control over the events of their lives is reinforced.

Herein lies the problem for motherhood as a route to desistance. In contrast to fatherhood, the idealised mother identity contradicts the emphasis in the desistance literature on agency and self-realisation in the identities of those who achieve desistance. Fatherhood has been shown to support desistance as it offers men an alternative, conventional identity that enables them to perform masculinity in pro-social ways (Carlsson, 2013). Men's fatherhood experiences have been presented characterized by choice (Carlsson, 2013). Their experiences bear no resemblance to the vulnerability, surveillance, shame, and stigma that characterized the experiences of the women in this research.

Studies have reaffirmed that women who are successfully able to use their identity as a mother to supersede their offending-related self-narratives are more likely to desist from crime (Cobbina and Bender, 2012). The motherhood identity is undermined by prison but, as a salient identity among this group, with the appropriate support may be employed to counter negative identities associated with imprisonment (Barnes and Stringer, 2014). However, motherhood offered no straightforward alternative narrative for women in this study. For many, motherhood was not a fixed or permanent state and, consequently, the possibilities it provided for the women to redefine themselves were precarious.

## 7.6. Conclusion

Envisioning desistance for many of the women in this project was perceived as a process of becoming 'normal'. Theirs were not conventional lives. Becoming, and being accepted as, conventional was cited as motivation to sustain desistance. Consequently, the women's images of alternative identities are conservative and traditional, and often hinged to being a 'good mum.' However, their experiences of trauma and victimisation present a significant obstacle to identity transformation. Shame and guilt in current desistance studies are presented as 'uncomfortable' emotions, but ones that have the benefit of increasing motivation to change. Consequently, it is perceived as part of an ultimately useful emotional trajectory towards identity transformation and desistance (Farrall, 2005; Farrall et al., 2014). Examining the women's identity narratives from a trauma perspective reveals how destructive shame, stigma, and isolation are to the women's sense of self. As their testimonies illustrate, in this context, their access to conventional identities is severely restricted. Trauma-informed approaches work in recognition that narrative coherence requires healing. A secure, integrated sense of self cannot simply be adopted, it has to be restored.

### **Principles for practice: Restoring a sense of self**

Based on the women's reflections on the impact of their experiences on their identity and sense of self, practice to support this aspect of desistance should:

- educate about the impact of complex trauma on identity (Covington and Russo, 2016)
- support the women in reconstructing their 'trauma stories,' including the traumatic imagery, emotions, and bodily sensations, so that they can control how their trauma is integrated into their identity (Herman, 1992/2015)
- undertake therapeutic work specifically focused on reducing shame and stigma (Elliot et al., 2005)
- help women maintain bonds with children and ties to a positive motherhood identity (Elliot et al., 2005).
- help women establish control of their bodies through the development of self-care skills and routines (Herman, 1992/2015)

## 8. Responsibility:

### Agency, autonomy, and accountability in women's desistance

Themes of responsibility and autonomy feature heavily in the desistance literature, though are usually conceptualised as agency. Indeed, agency is often examined together with socio-structural factors as one of the two main drivers of desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Healy, 2013; King, 2012). So accepted are the concepts that there is limited critical discussion of agency, the research instead focusing on 'which comes first' (LeBel et al., 2008). The decision to interpret this theme as responsibility rather than agency in this analysis is an attempt to reconstruct understandings of agency and its relationship to desistance from the perspective of women's lived experiences. Agency and responsibility are not synonymous, but did come together in the women's narratives of how they envisaged leaving crime behind.

Overwhelmingly, the women expressed the belief that successfully changing their lifestyle was contingent on taking personal responsibility. However, their perceived capacity for self-direction, better decision-making, and personal accountability were set jarringly against the structural, relational, and personal constraints to their autonomy.

The interpretation of responsibility presented here is the result of coding that revealed conflict between how the women conceptualised responsibility, agency, and autonomy, and the obstacles they envisaged and encountered in exercising personal responsibility over their lives. It consolidates themes of 'being strong,' 'exercising agency,' 'taking control,' 'accepting responsibility,' 'internal/external locus of control,' 'believing in ability to change,' and 'feelings of self-efficacy' from the initial and focused coding [Appendix C(i-iii)].

This chapter analyses the participants' understandings of the scope and boundaries of personal responsibility in sustaining desistance. It begins by comparing constructions of agency in desistance theories and from feminist perspectives. It considers themes related to responsibility from the pre-release interviews, noting the women's tendency to draw on neo-liberal notions of responsibility to express how they perceive their control over the

desistance process. Associated with this, it also examines the relationship between resilience and responsibility in the women's lives. The second part of this chapter explores the women's post-prison experiences of efforts to accept and assert personal responsibility over their lives, examining key constraints they encountered, namely socio-economic marginalisation, gender and sex role expectations, constraints imposed by the criminal justice system, and psychological barriers to self-determination. Throughout, understandings of the impacts of trauma on responsibility are examined to consider whether these can be usefully applied as a way of framing and supporting women's ability to exercise appropriate agency and personal responsibility after release. The analysis concludes that supporting women to develop the autonomy required for successful desistance requires empowerment approaches to practice that understand agency not as a trait possessed by individuals, but as developed incrementally, relationally, and within each individual's specific context and constraints.

## 8.1. Personal responsibility in the desistance process

As discussed in chapter two, there is ongoing debate within the desistance literature regarding the primacy of agency over structural factors in successful desistance (LeBel et al., 2008). Across the board however, the role of agency in desistance is presented as a fairly straightforward dichotomy; desisters exhibit and exercise agency, persisters do not (for example, Healy, 2013; King, 2012; LeBel et al., 2008; Maruna, 2001).

Liberal notions of agency refer to the power individuals have to act in ways that shape the trajectories of their lives. Constructions of agency tend to rest on assumptions of choice, free-will, and self-direction (Abrams, 1999; MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000). Accordingly, autonomy is conceptualised as fundamentally individualistic and rational. To be autonomous is to be independent and directed by desires and characteristics that are representative of an 'authentic' self, rather than externally imposed (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000). The associations between identity, discussed in the preceding chapter, and agency are explicit. Agentic action is dependent upon a robust sense of self.

Feminist theorists initially welcomed ideals of autonomy. Superficially, they offer both a moral position from which to criticise gender-based oppression and emancipatory goals of independence and self-direction (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000). However, they also identified problems with the liberal conception of autonomy, as it fails to take into account the individual and their social positionality (Young 1990; Graham, 2000). Identity-defining factors such as our embodiment, sexual orientation, and identification with traditions, cultures, and race, are not easily subject to manipulation or transformation. Consequently, some feminist perspectives came to view autonomy as an inherently masculine concept, bound up with masculine character ideals and assumptions about agency and selfhood that are problematic within political contexts that have historically been hostile to women's self-determination (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Meyers, 1987).

Desistance theories largely draw on traditional liberal understandings of agency that emphasise individualism, willpower, and rationality (King, 2012; LeBel et al., 2008). Whilst recognising the interactions between agency and opportunity (Healy, 2013; King, 2012; LeBel et al., 2008), they have been blind to the gendered adversities and expectations women leaving prison face that can limit their opportunities to exercise agency (Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter and Calverley, 2011). Notably, desistance theories say little about how agency interacts with or is impacted by relationships. Nor do they consider the impact of victimisation and trauma on agency and understandings of personal responsibility, both of which, as shown in chapter six, can place significant restrictions on women's self-governance.

The women's sense of responsibility was articulated through comments relating to being strong, taking advantage of opportunities, doing things for themselves, gaining independence, and avoiding a 'feared self' (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009). Overall, these comments convey that the women feel change is their responsibility, repeated in variations of statements such as 'it's down to me now' (Amy, initial interview), and 'I need to be strong' (Miriam, initial interview). However, in this research, the dichotomy between agentic desisters and fatalistic persisters was not so clear. Both those women who were returned to custody and those who were not often attached caveats to assertions linking personal responsibility, self-efficacy, and perseverance to desistance. These caveats reflected three main concerns. Firstly, the women often acknowledged personal responsibility for change alongside a need

for help, both in terms of practical resources and emotional or psychological support. A second group of concerns related to avoiding 'something bad happening,' such as relapse into drug use, having contact with ex-partners, or losing children. Finally, personal responsibility was expressed as contingent on 'something good happening,' such as accessing treatment, re-establishing valued relationships, or securing housing. Therefore, rather than clear differences in desister/persister accounts of personal responsibility, most women in this study articulated *constrained* responsibility for the future trajectories of their lives.

## 8.2. Assertions of responsibility and agency when envisioning desistance from prison

Autonomy and agency were conspicuous in the majority of the women's life stories only by their absence. Childhoods characterised by abuse, experiences of the care system, exploitation, drug use, mental illness, and domestic abuse that have been detailed in this study, all contributed to offending that was often a desperate attempt to assert some control over a life of dependency and uncertainty. Whether their offending had been financially motivated (for example, Elishima, Yasmin, Frankie), retaliatorily violent (for example, Lynne, Misha), or drug-related (for example, Amy, Miriam, Victoria), their behaviour can be viewed as an attempt to exercise agency over their lives. Interestingly, pressure from *over-responsibility* also featured in their offending stories, such as having financial commitments to their families (for example, Erin, Yasmin), caring responsibilities from a young age (for example, Pamela), or parents who were struggling with their own addictions and mental illness (for example, Ruby, Alice). This over-responsibility had not resulted in an agentic sense of self. Paradoxically, it embedded the feeling that the women were unable to control their own lives, as in Erin's experience,

So I do feel more responsible and I feel there's more pressure to look out for [my mum] and things that happen, I'll try and think; oh, how's that going to affect her, so I always put that first rather than thinking about how it would affect me or the long term problems that it would bring up... But I'm very good and I'm like that even in any job that I do, rather than give other people responsibility I'd rather keep it all myself and do it myself. So I think I just carried that on and that's just the kind of person I am, I



would do stuff and just keep doing it and people keep piling stuff on, I just keep doing it (Erin).

Consequently, the women's experiences of responsibility were highly distorted. They either had none, or they had too much. In order to reconfigure conceptualisations of agency and its impact on the desistance process, this chapter will now apply trauma and feminist perspectives on autonomy to the women's comments in relation to four themes; the women's assertions that their autonomy could transcend their life experiences, their reflections on the scope and boundaries to their autonomy, their notions of choice and moral responsibility, and their conviction that individual determination and perseverance would be sufficient to sustain change. Their experiences reveal gendered structural impediments to agency and responsibility of importance to understanding and supporting women's experiences of desistance.

### 8.2.1. Autonomy transcending experience

I put my mind to it. It's down to you. It's got to be the individual. If you don't want to stop you're not going to stop. ... because at the first place when I got involved in drugs, it was me what put myself on it, so the way I look at it is, if I put myself on it, I can get myself out of it, and that's how I deal with it. But, other people can't deal with it like that, and it's a lot to do with your mentality as well, how strong you are, and willpower, I'm very strong, if I put my mind to it, I can do whatever I want to do, yes? (Miriam, initial interview)

In depicting a strong belief in her ability to direct her life after prison, Miriam expresses a sentiment echoed by many of the women in the initial interviews. Miriam's account is individualist. Change is dependent on her motivation, her strength, and her willpower. It is her responsibility to drive change because she is responsible for her criminality. She reflects LeBel et al.'s (2008: 138) '*strong subjective*' model of desistance in which the individual's mind-set is all-important. Her comments also reflect several components of liberal theorists' conceptions of autonomy and agency, in particular her understanding of agency as a trait one possesses rather than a '*dynamic interaction between the person and their environment*' (Healy, 2013: 564).

General theories of desistance identify those most likely to desist as, like Miriam, expressing unrealistic levels of self-direction (Maruna, 2001), but her experience reveals a gendered dimension to this. Though Miriam has accepted responsibility for the direction her life has taken, the details of her life clearly indicate that the responsibility is not entirely hers. Her ability to exercise agency over her life was constrained from the age of thirteen when she was first subject to the sexual abuse that led to her drug use and offending.

Herman (1992/2015) detailed the impact of prolonged, complex trauma on autonomy and personal responsibility. Put simply, childhood and domestic abuse erode the victim's capacity for autonomy. Prolonged trauma only occurs in situations where the victim is held captive, unable to escape, and therefore stripped of agency (Herman, 1992/2015). Feminist perspectives on domestic and childhood abuse reframed societal understanding of abusive behaviours as displays of power and control (Dobash and Dobash, 1998; Westmarland, 2015). Such abuse necessitates the destruction of the victim's autonomy while simultaneously assigning blame to her. These perspectives are not arguing that women give up their agency, but highlighting that the scope for self-determination for survivors of abuse is severely constricted (Herman, 1992/2015). Autonomy and moral principles are often surrendered in pursuit of survival. Psychological coping strategies that surrender agency and accept blame, such as altered consciousness, dissociation, thought suppression, minimisation, and denial are necessary to survive prolonged trauma (Herman, 1992/2015; van der Kolk, 2014). However, as Herman (1992/2015) states, whilst these are ingenious adaptations in the context of surviving prolonged abuse, they are ineffectual in a climate of freedom and adult responsibility. Kitt's comments are an example of how processes of self-blame and responsibility helped her cope when she was raped. In order to avoid feeling 'raped,' she took responsibility for the assault.

...and he climbed in my window, I was lying down asleep, and he climbed in, opened the window and he just came straight at me with a large knife and said to me, don't scream because I'll push it through your neck. So at first my mind was like, I can't allow this to happen, I don't want to feel raped, I've got to try and make it like I consented to this. But it didn't, I was petrified (Kitt).

Desistance theories recognise the interplay between social context and the ability to exercise agency (Giordano et al., 2002; Healy 2013; King 2012; LeBel et al., 2008). However, they pay limited attention to how oppressive socialisation and social contexts impact on

conceptualisations of agency and responsibility, a primary concern for feminist scholars and one taken up in some studies of women's desistance (Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013; Österman, 2018). This research indicates that notions of responsibility and autonomy are complicit with structures of domination and subordination. A particularly insidious example of this for women, and one evident in Miriam's depiction of her responsibility, is when women are held responsible, through the law, politics, language, and culture for the harms perpetrated against them, such as sexual and domestic abuse (Abrams, 1999). The autonomy Miriam expresses (see p. 169) hides a lifetime of sexual exploitation for which she should not be held accountable, yet for which she considers herself to blame. Miriam's assertions demonstrate her belief that by accepting responsibility, she can simply transcend the harms inflicted on her, the possible futility of this being exemplified by the persistence of her drug use and involvement in prostitution/sex work throughout her lifetime.

### 8.3.2. Determination, perseverance, and personal responsibility

Misha, Pamela, and Amy all express the importance of perseverance, hard work, and determination to establishing and maintaining change. All three women had personal experiences of repeated sexual and violent victimisation. Misha and Amy also had severe drug addictions and mental health problems. Despite this, in common with previous studies on women's desistance, they make little reference to the structural barriers that may limit the effectiveness of perseverance to sustaining change (Giordano et al., 2002; Leverentz, 2014).

If there's nothing at the gate for you, then you put it in place for yourself. You get on them and you bug them and you bug them and you bug them, until you get what you need to change your life. If you don't want to change your life, you'll ask them once and when you don't get it, you'll just think fuck it. You won't change. Do you know what I mean, you need to want to change and be persistent. If you're not persistent, you won't get nowhere (Misha)

That there's more to life than being in and out of prison, and that if I try harder, if I can get a job I can become a better person, I can live an industrious life. (Pamela)

It's not determination, I've got to do this. If I don't, I'm going to be back in here having a conversation again, and I do not want that, if all things go wrong. So it's down to me now, the ball's in my court, I've got to do something (Amy, initial interview)

Giordano et al. (2002) argue that whilst an individual's sense of their own agency is fundamental to the change process, the environment must provide the scaffolding that can support significant life changes (Giordano et al., 2002). All three women commented on the key structural support they needed during our sessions. Misha needed residential rehabilitation, Pamela secure housing, and Amy consistent support for her mental health condition. However, as evidenced in the quotations, they did not make direct correlations between these and any limits to their personal responsibility.

Feminist perspectives on agency provide an important corrective in this regard. Intersectional, or 'fourth wave', feminists have attempted to reconfigure notions of agency and responsibility to take account of the different personal, social, political, and historical contexts in which individuals are embedded, and their impact on conceptualisations of autonomy and responsibility (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000; Potter, 2013). By focusing on particular features of individuals' identities, intersectional feminists emphasise why caution is required before applying liberal notions of responsibility in this context. Misha, Pamela, and Amy's stories illustrate the struggles involved in trying to exert personal responsibility against a backdrop of multiple marginalisation, including gender, race, socio-economic status, mental illness, addiction, and repeated victimisation.

To illustrate this further, a comparison can be made between their experiences and those of Michaela.

I just know that I'm scared, but I know that one day I will be a success story that's left from here. I'm more determined now to be more successful than I've ever been determined. I refuse to make coming here drag me down. I know that I'm going to reach where I want to reach in life. I might have to work slightly harder for it than a normal person without a criminal record, but I believe that I'm going to make it. So that alone I think will give me the strength to cope when I come out, it's the determination (Michaela, initial interview).

Despite few differences in their expressed beliefs in the importance of determination and persistence to how they envisaged desistance, Misha, Pamela, and Amy were all returned to custody during the timeframe of this project, but Michaela was not. Given the extent of their needs, perseverance and personal effort were, ultimately, insufficient to sustain significant

lifestyle change. On the basis of their assertions above, this could be interpreted by them as the result of personal failure. Current criminal justice discourses would reinforce their individual responsibility for failing to sustain motivation and build on changes they made while in custody, reducing their recidivism to not trying hard enough, not being persistent. In reality, the scaffolding that each needed to provide a foundation to their efforts to change was not provided. I was unable to locate Pamela or Misha for a follow up session, but was informed by Misha's grandmother that she had returned to drugs and prostitution after release. A rehabilitation place had not been found for her. Amy was doing well at the first follow-up session, but by the second was back in HMP Holloway. Problems with the provision of her mental health care had resulted in a relapse into drug use. By contrast, Michaela had some of the scaffolding in place to support her determination. Her life prior to her offence had not been one associated with criminality. Other than some public order infractions, this was her first conviction. She lived with her family who were financially and emotionally supportive and had only limited experience of the justice system. She had completed her education and was attending college. Michaela described herself as having 'gone off the rails.' Her offence was preceded by increasingly chaotic alcohol use, but her peer group was not involved in crime or associated behaviours. Her life had strong foundations to support her fall. She was loved, connected to others, actively working towards a career and wider life goals. In this context, Michaela's determination was all important. As Giordano et al. (2002: 1026) point out, *'in relatively advantaged circumstances, agentic moves might determine successful desistance, but under conditions of multiple disadvantage, they are unlikely to be nearly enough.'*

### 8.3.3. Exercising choice and moral responsibility

It's about choice. You could choose to do it again, but you know what the punishment's going to be. So, it's all about choice at the end of the day. Because if I never left my house that day, when the man texted me, if I'd just have ignored it, I would not be sitting here having this conversation with you right now. I chose to leave my house, I chose to come to jail basically. It's all about choices, you can't go around in life blaming other people for your mistakes, you have to take ownership. You know, when you're little, you know right from wrong. It follows you through life. You can decide to do wrong, there's a consequence, and you can decide to do right, there's a consequence. Every action has a reaction, so they say (Jasmine).

Jasmine's reflections on choice echo themes of moral responsibility in notions of agency posited by political liberalism (Rawls, 1993 cited in Graham, 2000). She personifies demands of neoliberal penology that an individual be morally accountable for their actions (Feeley and Simon, 1992). These concepts are at the heart of correctional interventions<sup>25</sup> that seek to correct the apparent faulty moral reasoning that contributes to offending.

Jasmine's offence was committed in the context of her attempting to rob a man who was seeking to sexually exploit her. Österman (2018), taking a different perspective, challenges feminist criminologists to consider whether this type of behaviour, albeit subconscious, is agentic resistance to patriarchal gender hierarchies. Whilst Jasmine accepts responsibility for the choices that she made that gave rise to her offence, she does not recognise or condemn the societal norms that excuse the sexual exploitation of women, nor the assumptions that women's bodies are commodities to be purchased by men. As Wolf (1990) highlights, individuals can be held responsible for actions that are properly attributable to them, when they are able to govern their actions as self-determining individuals. However, this culpability becomes problematic, as in Jasmine's situation, when the social responsibility for normalising the sexual exploitation of women is never acknowledged. The result being that women continue to be held responsible for gendered violence and sexual abuse perpetrated against them (Meyer, 2016).

This research challenges constructions of moral responsibility and accountability that ignore the dangers of attributing responsibility and blame in oppressive social contexts. Moral responsibility has been at the heart of much feminist activism. Feminism strives to expose responsibility by clearly naming violence against women and its male perpetrators, whilst also underscoring the importance of women taking responsibility for their feelings, perceptions, desires, and actions as a prerequisite for reclaiming and expanding their personal and political agency (Benson, 2000). Feminist theorists have analysed associations between responsibility and blameworthiness, commenting on the how systematic distortion of responsibility is a feature of most resilient forms of social oppression as blameworthiness is transferred from the collective to the individual (Benson, 2000; Meyer, 2016). This explains

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<sup>25</sup>Exercises to address faulty moral reasoning feature in general offending behaviour programmes such as the Thinking Skills Programme and Enhanced Thinking Skills.

how, for example, domestic abuse and rape become attributed to women's poor self-esteem and sexual impropriety as opposed to permissive patriarchal culture around male entitlement and the sexual oppression of women (MacKinnon, 1989; Westmarland, 2015). This psychologising of the multiple inequalities that women confront expects women to take responsibility for life choices in contexts not of their making, and over which they have little or no agency (McCorkel, 2013; Meyer, 2016).

I was young, I was 16, I was raped. I was good at school, got all my GCSEs. I've been very... My education side is very good but the rape, it set off a lot of things in my family home....I took drugs for a long time, only cannabis but it's still drugs. Then I was in domestic violence for nine years. My life has been like that, severe domestic violence and then drug use to take away the pain of the domestic violence. I've always been in trouble with the police (Casey).

Feminist critiques denounce a focus on women's victimisation on the grounds that it further denies women's agency (Batchelor, 2005; Mardorossian, 2014; Hannah-Moffat and Innocente, 2013). However, the current #MeToo, gender pay gap, body positivity, pro-choice, and 'Everyday Sexism' movements are just some examples of how women have started to rally as victims in a way that re-appropriates the concept, exposing the arbitrariness of any dichotomy between agency and victimisation in a context of gender oppression (Mardorossian, 2014).

In this research, self-blame was a common response to abuse and victimisation and it is reinforced by social and cultural discourse (Herman, 1992/2014). Women are used to feeling and being made to feel responsible not only for what they have done, but also for what has been done to them (Meyer, 2016). Lucy blames herself for failing to properly cope with abuse she experienced in childhood, making a 'stupid' choice about how to respond to her victimisation.

Most of my drug taking has stemmed from when I was abused as a child and I always drank and took cannabis when I was a kid to shield the pain. Or if I ever had a problem or feeling of depression I take drugs so I'd feel better. Because in the sense I thought it made me feel good and that I couldn't feel the pain that I was feeling and the hurt. But now I think bloody hell how stupid I was because I could have just dealt with it, I could have gone to a counsellor or confronted it, I could have...instead I was taking drugs to mask it instead of fronting it and dealing it (Lucy).

Jasmine and Lucy were returned to custody during the course of this project. Their profound *mea culpa*, assertions of responsibility, choice, and belief in self-determination were insufficient to sustain change on release, despite the importance afforded to these concepts in desistance theorising. This suggests that a global, unqualified sense of moral responsibility is of limited value in understanding women's desistance. In order for women to meaningfully exercise moral responsibility, they must be empowered to relinquish self-blame and build self-worth (Benson, 2000). Trauma informed approaches encourage women to reflect on and face aspects of their lives they have suppressed and avoided (Herman, 1992/2015; Elliot et al., 2005; Covington and Russo, 2016). It is conceivable that this process could induce trauma. Both becoming aware of victimisation that had previously not been recognised as such, and the process of uncovering suppressed trauma seemingly have the potential to re-traumatise. However, an early evaluation of a trauma informed intervention in women's prisons found that feelings of empowerment and liberation were the most common outcome of this work and that this enabled the women to accept appropriate responsibility for their own harmful behaviours (Petrillo et al., 2019).

#### 8.3.4. Connecting responsibility and reflection

I can't say I got tough overnight, a lot of soul searching got me to where I am now. If the partner I'm with now was to ever lay his hand on me, I'd break it and then walk out the door, but back then, I don't know, man, I suppose you just have to start loving yourself a bit better. And, like, my best friend just had her first daughter then as well, so I started finding things to live for. I wouldn't want my god children to see me with a black eye and them thinking it's alright and them going out and letting their boyfriend beat them up, I'd kill them. I swear there comes a time in your life where you have to be responsible, innit, and accept responsibility. I know it's going to be hard for me to accomplish the things that I want to do, but I know what I'm going to do now, because if I could go out and rob and steal to smoke drugs, I could sure as hell get myself to uni and get to Jamaica to see my nan (Janelle).

Janelle's account reveals a process of reflection that explains her understanding of personal responsibility, its scope, and boundaries. Procedural autonomy theorists focus on how people make autonomous decisions. From these perspectives, a person uses critical reflection to learn about herself, including her beliefs, desires, values, and goals. Self-directed decisions and actions then are those that are in-keeping with this known, 'authentic' self



(Charles, 2010). Agency, as it is conceptualised in desistance theories, reflects these notions of procedural autonomy. These perspectives are evident, for example, in the position of agency in Maruna's (2001) redemption narratives. Redemption narratives are explicitly preceded by an agentic perception of personal control over one's destiny and by the establishment of the core beliefs that characterise the person's 'true self' (Maruna, 2001: 88). Chapter seven explained some of the ways in which experiences of abuse and trauma presented obstacles to restoring a sense of self or accessing a 'true self' for women in this research. That said, research on women's desistance, supports the importance of reflexivity to sustaining personal change. McIvor et al.'s (2009) study found self-reflection to be linked to women's personal resolve to sustain change and take active steps to disassociate from offending lifestyles and associates. In Stone et al.'s, (2016) research, women desisters described opportunities for developing agency by increasing self-knowledge through introspection or personal achievement. Janelle's reflexivity is explicit in her reference to 'a lot of soul searching.' The evaluation of her beliefs, desires, values, and goals has enabled her to positively reframe her offending as symbolic of her ability to exercise agency over her life.

From a post-modern feminist perspective, gender and sex role socialisation means self-definition cannot be achieved through simply excavating a 'true self' or disentangling oneself from social influences (Abrams, 1999). Instead, self-definition involves becoming aware of the way in which one's self-concept is socially constituted. Feminist critiques question the very existence of a 'true' self, waiting to be discovered and in possession of self-determining free will that operates outside the exigence of structural power. These critiques draw on notions of the self as constituted '*within and by gendered social systems and interpersonal interactions that constrain the exercise of agency*' (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000:11). Therefore, rather than re-discovering a 'real me,' the role for reflection in exercising autonomy is to develop awareness of the mechanisms of group-based disempowerment, to allow women to make a choice about whether and how these impact on her autonomy (Abrams, 1999).

Janelle's acknowledgement of the challenges that lie ahead reveals accepting responsibility to be an active process. The desistance research makes little comment on how agency is developed. It relies instead on personal resources such as motivation and effective coping strategies. Meyers' (1987) reconstruction of agency emphasises autonomy as something that

a person *accomplishes* and that can therefore be achieved through the exercise of a repertoire of skills, which she terms 'autonomy competencies' (Meyers, 1987: 627), '*a set of introspective, imaginative, reasoning, and volitional skills*' that support self-directed action.

Casey's reflections on prison illustrate this process.

Being in prison for a long time, I've been here nearly seventeen months and it makes you look at things differently, your family, what's important and setting small goals. I don't want to have this life anymore. So I've become stronger. I think I've found myself. It makes you look at who you are and you find who you are. I think most people walk around half asleep and the subconscious always picks away and you live on that fear and pain, and things, but really it ain't really there if you focus properly and you do the right things. I'm trying (Casey).

In Meyers' (1987) construction of agency, people can develop autonomy by addressing situation-specific questions that elicit introspective reflection. As they develop self-awareness, they start to voice their own beliefs and desires; '*In sum, to the extent that individuals survey their options guided by their self-scrutinized feelings, values, goals, and the like, and then marshal the determination to follow their own counsel, they live autonomously*' (Meyers, 1987: 627).

Desistance studies have under-emphasized the identity-constituting ties individuals have to gender, race, class, culture, sexual orientation, religion, or intersecting marginalised identities and their connections with constructions of agency. By contrast, feminist perspectives consider how the practices of identity construction are shaped by a patriarchy that tends to socialise less powerful groups to forms of subordination that impose structural limits to their agency (Abrams, 1999). This has important implications for the ways in which women in this study were able to assert agency and personal responsibility.

## 8.4. Resilience and responsibility

Resilience and responsibility are commented on repeatedly in my early reflections on the interviews [Appendix B]. The women did not name resilience themselves, but their stories were those of an enduring will to survive in the face of multiple adversities. The women's stories demonstrated a refusal to be defeated, a belief that they can overcome whatever challenges they face and achieve a better life. These beliefs seemed to drive their personal responsibility for change.

Whilst fatalism was by no means absent from their narratives, the majority of the women ultimately concluded that change was their responsibility. The extent of the adversity they had thus far survived made sense of this belief.

However, their resilience, at times, manifested in behaviours that undermine successful desistance. It was notable that the ways in which some of the women spoke about substance use, self-harm, and offending suggested that these were, on occasion, an expression of their agency and autonomy. It feels incongruent to speak of drug use as an agentic act of resilience, but many of the women felt that drugs had saved their lives.

...there's a lot of girls have been abused by their dads and things. I've really come to terms with it now, over the years, I'm ok, but I was really messed up then, because I didn't understand I suppose...maybe if I was in a different situation and I tried crack I might not have done it again, but it just took all them bad feelings away and that was perfect for me (Maeve)

I know this sounds a bit mad, but sometimes I feel that if Class A drugs weren't invented, some people would have killed themselves because of their grief and what they've been through and stuff, if they haven't got something to alter their mood, they would just think of suicide because I thought of suicide (Alice)

Self-harm was also described by Alice and others as an act of resilience. Alice's self-harm was deliberate and intentional to keep her safe from further rape.

It [self-harm] has been related to drug use and from being raped, because I didn't want to be pretty anymore (Alice).

For Latifah, self-harm helped her manage her alcohol use.

When I used to cut myself, the first time I did it I thought, wow, there's something other than alcohol that's making me feel better (Latifah).

Substance use and self-harm ultimately create conditions in which shame and vulnerability thrive and thus erode autonomy and responsibility. However, for Maeve, Alice, Latifah, and others it is also a wilful act of survival. Criminal behaviours functioned as acts of autonomy and resilience in a similar way, echoing Österman's (2018) construction of women's

offending as agentic resistance to gender hierarchies above, Lucy, for example, spoke of choosing to commit the crimes rather than leave herself vulnerable to victimisation.

...I'm glad that I didn't get to the stage where I was selling myself like other girls that I know that was. And have asked me. They did ask me to go with them but that ain't me, do you know what I mean? I never...although I was desperate but at times I wasn't...I didn't want to go that low if you know what I mean? (Lucy).

The women's accounts of prostitution/sex work exemplify the subjectivity of what constitutes an agentic, resilient response in situations of significant adversity (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995). For some, like Lucy, committing crime enabled her to avoid becoming involved in prostitution/sex work and this provided her with increased self-worth. For others, the opposite was true. They used prostitution/sex work to avoid crime and felt better for this.

I worked in a brothel, and this makes mad money, it was mine. And I weren't doing nobody no harm (Kitt).

In conceptualisations of resilience, 'survivor' and 'survival' refer to maladaptation (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995). In the feminist canon, the terms emphasise the positive. The words celebrate the resilience of women who have endured prolonged violence and abuse and jettison all the negative connotations of the 'victim' label (see for example, Kelly, 1988).

Joseph (2013) suggests that features of resilience such as making informed decisions, preparedness, taking responsibility, demonstrating adaptability, and growing through adversity fit neatly with neoliberal forms of governance that put the emphasis on the individual to adapt to things beyond their control. The individual repercussions are exemplified here by Misha. Despite the significant adversity she had faced (see chapter six), she concluded,

When you start realising you done those things, no-one ever made you, and taking responsibility for some of your actions, then you learn to be able to move on and be able to want to change your life for the better (Misha).

As revealed by this research, trauma and crime-related manifestations of agency are clearly highly problematic in relation to the women's well-being and to desistance, but they had a

function that went beyond coping and that corresponds with feminist notions of survival (Herman, 1992/2015). They enabled the women to feel they were asserting some control over their lives in the face of highly restricted options (Österman, 2018).

## 8.5. Relational autonomy

Feminist theorists have reconstructed agency and autonomy within a relational context.

MacKenzie and Stoljar (2000) advance the concept of '*relational autonomy*' (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000: 4). Relational autonomy developed from attempts to redefine traditional ideals of autonomy that prioritise independence and self-sufficiency at the expense of a recognition of the value of relationships. Such connections are traditionally central to women's lives and symbolically tied to femininity (for example, Gilligan, 1993). Therefore by conceptualising relationships as an obstacle to autonomy, traditional notions of agency devalue women's experiences arising from relationships, such as love, loyalty, friendship, and care, to constructions of autonomy (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000). Casey's comments illustrate the interconnectedness of her relationships to her self-determination.

I had a shit life and it was chaotic and my behaviour was stupid. I know that I've got different choices and I've got children that need me and I need to be there for my mum and dad. I think you grow up a lot in your head. I think prison this time, out of the five times I've been, has grown me up to make me realise what's really important in life, and that's not to just exist in here, it's to live it to be enjoyed, I think. My dad says the world's my oyster, but it's not about proving anyone anything; it's about doing it for me. Like I've got letters from my kids, it's time for you to change, forget about anyone and everyone, it's about you, and I know that I can be a good person and I've got so much good to give and I think I'm getting there (Casey).

Her determination to change is a commitment to herself, but is bound up with feelings of accountability to her father and children, reflecting an approach to autonomy which includes responsibilities to family and community (Gilligan, 1993). Most contemporary constructions of agency now acknowledge that any meaningful understandings of agency must account for human interdependency (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000).

Meyers (1987) argues that emotional ties to others cannot be excluded from conceptions of an autonomous life. Commitment to family life, employment, or any community or social engagement requires relinquishing some degree of personal freedom. Therefore, notions of

responsibility and agency must find a balance between the exercise of agency and external obligations. Rebecca's comments capture both the importance and challenges of autonomy as a relational process. In exercising agency around her recovery, she is attentive to the impact on her family, but this does not displace her own needs.

Obviously, I feel grateful and I do have responsibilities, but I don't have to do it for them, it's for me; if I do it for me then everything else will come with it naturally. Because if I put too much pressure on me, thinking that I've got to be responsible for what everyone's done, that it's gonna get too much; it's just one step at a time, just as long as I show my gratitude to them. Obviously I'm always there for them if they need support, but I think that's right, yeah, because if I start to feel responsible then it just puts pressure, yeah, unnecessary pressure (Rebecca).

There is limited comment in the desistance literature on agency as a relational process, as a set of competencies developed in a context of interdependency with others. This research suggests relational autonomy provides a helpful framework through which to understand women's experiences of personal responsibility and autonomy in their efforts to sustain desistance.

## 8.5. Exercising agency and personal responsibility post-release

Assertions of responsibility and self-determination emerged very clearly from the pre-release interviews as important to the women's understanding of how they would desist from crime. However, they were noticeably less prominent in the post-release sessions. Proclamations of personal choice, responsibility, and control almost disappeared. Instead, the women spoke of the ways in which they felt their agency was impeded by various factors, to the detriment of their efforts to sustain change. This chapter will now explore the constraints the women faced to exercising agency in, and taking responsibility for, their lives post-release within two broad realms, those being structural constraints and emotional/psychological constraints. A controlled environment such as a prison by its nature fosters dependence and powerlessness, what McCorkel (2013: 77) terms '*rehabilitative paternalism*' (see also, Covington and Bloom, 2003). Revisiting the theme of responsibility in the follow-up interviews, those involved all commented on the challenges of taking responsibility for their lives after spending time in prison where they had none. They are told when to wake up, when to go to bed, when and what to eat. They are escorted to work, to exercise, have

specific time for specific tasks. Whilst this encourages useful routine, the women unanimously found it to be problematic in relation to their post-release experiences. They had gone from having lives that felt chaotic to a life that was highly structured, but over which they still had no control. The helpful routines and structures in prison were not easily transferable to the outside world and its contingent pressures and demands, as Zoe explains,

You're not allowed to decide anything [in prison]. So people who don't have life skills, aren't able, you know, never take responsibility for their actions, they don't get to practice it. But the moment they walk out of the door...they're supposed to be this magical, you know, responsible person (Zoe, FU1).

The women in this study experienced a crippling lack of agency following release from prison. Whilst this improved somewhat between the first and second follow-up sessions, the levels of personal responsibility for change expressed while the women were in prison were never reflected in their post-release narratives. Instead, the women reported learning how to cope with challenges, as opposed to transcending them through force of will, determination, exercising choice, or hard work.

This chapter will now consider the specific limits to responsibility identified by the women in this project.

### 8.6.1 Socio-economic barriers to autonomy

Employment and accommodation were identified as important to sustaining desistance. Whilst much has been made of the capacity for employment to nurture agency and self-determination in the general desistance literature (Laub and Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 2001), it features much less in the research on women's desistance. None of the women who participated in the post-release sessions had employment arranged for their release, though Catherine returned to her former job three months after her release. In the following comments, Catherine's sense of agency around her paid employment is contrasted with her feelings about her domestic responsibilities.

...that's why I want to go back to work, then I'll feel better, because I'll know that I'll be doing something. And, although, obviously, my children and my family are worthwhile, it's different, because it's just something for me...Yes, hoovering is not enough every day, you've got to make sure everywhere is tidy and clean, the washing

is done, the ironing is done, the children's bedrooms, and that's it. And, you've picked them up, and you've given them dinner, and you've bathed them, and made sure they've brushed their teeth before they go to bed. Some people have got it in them to live that life, haven't they, they love it, they thrive on it. I just think there's more to life than that, the dull main housework. (Catherine, FU1)

Frankie also secured employment within a few weeks of her release. She perceived her offence to be related to her having too much responsibility in her former place of employment. Her comments about her new position illustrate how the right employment can create a sense of personal control and self-determination.

So I think I really enjoy having less responsibility. Even though there is terms I could progress within the company, I don't think it's the avenue I want to take, because I quite enjoy the fact that I'm home by quarter to seven, I can have dinner with my mum, I can go out maybe for a few drinks on a week day and I can go to work the next day. So in terms of that work/life balance it's great....Is it something I want to do for the rest of my life? Probably not. But I think for this period of my life it's what I needed. I needed a steady ship. I needed something that was going to give me stability and a chance really (Frankie, FU1).

Reflecting previous research on education and employment among women in prison (for example, Corston, 2007; Hannah-Moffat and Innocente, 2013), the reality for the women in this research was that few gained employment following release (see chapter five).<sup>26</sup>

The housing needs of women leaving prison are well-documented (for example, Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013; McIvor et al., 2009) and there was further evidence of them in this study. Of the fourteen women who participated in the follow-up sessions, only three (Frankie, Catherine, and Lynne) had their own stable accommodation to which they were released. Housing was mentioned but not discussed in depth in the pre-release discussions, but problems securing stable, appropriate accommodation featured heavily in the post-release interviews, notably in relation to the women's exclusion from decisions about their accommodation. Of particular importance to the topic of responsibility and agency were the experiences of those released homeless. Jane's experiences reflect some of the limits of agency in relation to housing.

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<sup>26</sup> Of the follow-up group, only Catherine and Frankie secured employment and Michaela returned to full-time education.



Jane was assessed as high risk and consequently was initially released to an approved premises (AP). There are only six approved premises for women in England and Wales.<sup>27</sup> Jane was placed in the one closest to her home, a one hour forty minute journey away. The AP was in a town Jane had no connections with. Concern about this was evident in her initial interview. Despite her attempts to offer alternative options, she felt she had no influence over the decision. When Jane and I next met it was nine months after her release and she had just moved into independent accommodation. She spoke of aspects of the AP that she had found helpful, such as being around other women who had experienced prison and the support from some of the staff. But the fact that she had no ties to the town meant that elements of support that were important to her sustaining change, such as mental health treatment, were delayed, or could not start until she returned to her home town. By the time move-on accommodation had been found, Jane had established a routine in the new town and wanted to stay. Again, she had no influence over this and was uprooted just at the point when her life started to feel more stable.

I did want to stay in [new town] because I felt I was safe in [new town] and I was settled in [new town], but you're not allowed to. But they don't tell you that when you move to [new town]. They don't tell you until you ask if you can stay in [new town] and they say no...So they bring you out of jail, they put you in an area where you don't know, then you just start to settle in that area and then they whip you up and put you in another area that you don't know. And I just don't see how that's conducive to you, when you're just getting settled, and then they whip you up again and move you somewhere else. I just don't get it. (Jane, FU1)

What was significant about this process is not the outcome, but that Jane felt completely excluded from the decision making about something as fundamental to her security as her home. Her comments and tone reveal frustration, anger, despair, and despondency. More importantly, this practice recreated aspects of domestic abuse trauma in her past that ultimately contributed to her offending.

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<sup>27</sup> There are one hundred approved premises for men in England and Wales.

### 6.4.2. Relationships and gender roles as barriers to autonomy and responsibility

Catherine's comments above (p.183-184) refer to another way in which the women experienced constraints to their autonomy after release. This was related to gender role socialisation and expectations.

Traditional gender socialisation means women are often called upon to put the interests of others first and define themselves in terms of their relationships with others (Meyers, 2000). For Meyers (1987), women's distinctive, constrained position stems from an ideology of separate 'spheres.' Women have traditionally been socialised from childhood to favour care-giving, self-sacrifice, and domesticity whilst men are encouraged to engage with more public opportunities that foster greater independence (see also, Abrams 1999; Gilligan, 1993). This can impact on the exercise of agency as women may come to see themselves as less worthy or capable human beings (Abrams, 1999). Catherine's self-doubt is evident as she talks about the pressures of reintegrating into her family.

I'm struggling, do you know what I mean. I was, when I first came out I was, like, yes, this, this, and this, but I find it really hard to be assertive and say, actually, I want it to be like this, please don't behave like that. And, I really struggle, so it ends up coming out all mixed up, and then we end up arguing, or the kids end up...or, I just lose the plot, do you know what I mean, and then I start shouting and it all just goes... It's been really hard. I just can't be consistent, it's too overwhelming to be able to keep doing it. And, you feel like you're totally on your own, and my head just goes, wow, just do whatever, please be quiet, just stop having a go at me. You know when you want to please everyone, because you've been away for so long. But, I was like that before, to be honest with you (Catherine, FU1).

There are important implications for practice that supports women's desistance here in recognising the significance of the ways in which socialisation may shape an individual's goals, or the ways in which one pursues them. Empowering women with an understanding of the socialised constraints to their autonomy may help them formulate more meaningful understandings of the scope and boundaries of personal responsibility.

### 6.4.3 Rules of supervision as barriers to autonomy and responsibility

The experience of probation supervision for the women in this study was varied. For some, it was helpful and felt essential to any progress they made (for example, Lynne, Miriam, Amy). For some it was benign, and of little value to their efforts to desist (for example, Catherine, Dawn, Frankie, Janine, Carla). For Jane and Zoe, supervision was experienced as actively obstructing the changes they wanted and felt they could make.

I wanted to go out, start afresh, because that's what most of us want, to go out and start afresh. All right, it doesn't really happen because probation have a lot of say in your life and it's not your life, so to be fair, it's not our life, even though we have to live it, we're not living it to suit us, we're living it to suit everybody else and that is an issue I have. It's not my life. Everything I want to do, I can't do. I can't go and live with my partner, I can't start afresh, I can't go to a new area because probation have said no. They put me in an area that couldn't be any further away from my family if I wanted to be. And then they say you need your support. You do, but you've put me over there and my family is somewhere else. It doesn't make sense. (Jane, initial interview)

Supervision constrained rather than encouraged personal responsibility and self-determination when the goals of the organisation and/or practitioner and the individual were at odds. This could partly be related to risk management obligations, but seemed more to reflect a failure to recognise or value the women's attempts to exert control over their lives. The significance of power played out in these scenarios. Whilst desistance supports approaches to practice that validate and develop collaborative autonomy (McNeill, 2006), these are easily undermined by the operation of post-release supervision in the current correctional climate, for example through lack of provision, over-cautious risk assessment, time pressures, or practitioners' lack of expertise (Fitzgibbon, 2008; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). The results can be a resort to authoritative approaches to supervision through the imposition of rules and expectations, as opposed to the collaborative explorations of strengths and goals and the processes through which they might be achieved. Benign experiences of supervision, whilst not actively damaging to the women's sense of autonomy, did not support its development. The result of this type of supervision was the women's disengagement with the process. They did not expect any meaningful support from their supervisors. As a result, they felt the personal responsibility for change acutely, but without

any guidance on how to develop the skills and competencies needed to exercise agency over their lives.

Do you know, there's no support from the probation service...He was, like, I want you to go on a thinking skills programme, I could have done that while I was in prison but, no, I've got to do that...and, he never makes the appointments, everything is always late, I just don't find him helpful at all, he's useless. And, there's no one else out there, do you know what I mean, who says, oh, how's it going, or keeps regular... If there was someone else that came, to try and keep you focused, but then, I suppose, you've got to do it yourself haven't you (Catherine, FU1).

Meaningful supervision demonstrated respect for the importance of women exercising self-determination and support in overcoming practical and emotional challenges to this. This translated as offering support and care without over-intervening or being overly directive (see chapter nine).

#### 6.4.4. Emotional/psychological barriers to autonomy and responsibility

In the follow-up sessions, the women identified low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence as significant emotional/psychological barriers to asserting autonomy. These also contributed to feelings of self-blame as opposed to appropriate responsibility. Trauma erodes self-esteem and confidence. Childhood abuse and domestic abuse in particular subject the victim to manipulation, exploitation, and grooming that leave them with no understanding of who they are (Herman 1992/2015; see also, chapter seven). These impacts of abuse are only recently coming into the public discourse with the recognition and naming of abusive behaviours such as grooming and 'gaslighting.' Trauma constrains autonomy because mechanisms to cope with trauma often negate any potential for the person to take control of their lives (van der Kolk, 2014). This featured in many of the women's pathways to crime, but it is also a feature of their post-release experiences.

In the initial sessions, many of the women added a caveat to their assertions about the importance of self-direction and personal responsibility that related to needing support, fear, or insecurity about their ability to direct the course of their lives. Liberal theories of agency imply characteristics of confidence and require high levels of self-esteem. This raised alarm bells for feminist theories because of concerns about the links between gendered

socialisation processes and self-esteem explained above (MacKenzie and Stoljar, 2000).

However for this group of women, the challenges are particularly acute.

Most of the women expressed a lack of confidence about their ability to exercise control over their lives post-release. This was the case whether they were returned to custody or not. Whilst one element of this was related to low self-esteem, another was related to lack of experience. Only Frankie, Zoe, and Michaela expressed relatively unqualified confidence about their ability to control their lives and they were the three with the most experience of success at this in their lives prior to their imprisonment. Interestingly, this changed for Zoe post-release. Of these three, she was the only one dependant on state provision of housing and welfare benefits on release. Her confidence about the control she had over her life was thrown into stark relief as she attempted to assert her agency against obstacles posed by the workings of the justice system and welfare state. By contrast, Frankie and Michaela were both young, living with their families, and in either employment or education soon after leaving prison.

For many of the women in this project, the experience of personal responsibility was either forced on them, or had negative outcomes (for example: offending, violence, self-harm). It had rarely been experienced as a positive, self-affirming action. This is where notions of episodic or situational agency can be useful. The task of becoming wholly self-determining is overwhelmingly challenging. Expecting women in the criminal justice system to take global responsibility for their lives in contexts of severely constrained choice and opportunity and histories of victimisation is unhelpful. However, confidence can be built through identifying opportunities for episodic and situational agency (Meyers, 1987).

Experiences of exercising agency positively in specific contexts can increase the women's self-esteem and confidence to take increasing responsibility for their lives. The following extended extract from my first follow-up session with Lynne illustrates the value of gaining incremental understanding of the links between her past experiences and problems with assertiveness and aggression, and the steps she took to overcome these;

- Lynne: But another thing for me was to say, no..., I would never say, no, I learnt that in prison to say, no, and mean, no. If I really don't want anything or, you know, no, and that is it.
- Madeline: So it made you more assertive?
- Lynne: It did, definitely yeah, and it made me more...less aggressive, because I had a lot of anger, you know, didn't matter who it was, I could just be angry with them, they said the wrong thing, it was bad really.
- Madeline: What was it about the prison that helped you, sort of, shift from that, from responding aggressively to just being able to just say, no, and just be assertive instead?
- Lynne: It was the groups really and me working as well, I think. I always wanted to say, no, but they taught me ways to say, no. It's tools again, it's the tools with lots of things...that and you're sitting listening and you think, oh God, yeah, and it makes sense, sometimes things just click, it just clicked and, a lot of times someone would ask me something and I'd say, oh, yeah, yeah, but I didn't really want to, but now I'd say...if someone said, do us a favour, I'd say what is it? Because normally I'd say, oh yeah, and I didn't want to say no...
- Madeline: Yeah.
- Lynne: So, yeah, now I can just say, no, if I don't like something I say, no.
- Madeline: Why do you think you couldn't do that before, have you unpicked that at all?
- Lynne: I think it was because I was always controlled. My dad was controlling, my partner was controlling, it was all control, yeah, definitely I was controlled.
- Madeline: Yeah, so you didn't feel like you even had a choice.
- Lynne: No, no, that's right, I didn't, you know, when you're in a relationship, and you're made to feel like nothing...no self-esteem, no confidence, when you're told something so many times, you believe it. Until you work on yourself really and you look at yourself you think, it's not me, he's the insecure one, it is, people put their insecurities onto you, which I've found out now as well, I'm 53, and it's took me all this time in life to find, you know, but at least I've found it.

The secure sense of self through which one comes to understand one's actions as their own was missing from many of the women's post-release experiences. One depiction of expressions of fatalistic beliefs or an external locus of control is as acts of self-sabotage (Maruna 2001: 78), but this interpretation minimises the severity of what the women are trying to cope with. It reflects a rational choice understanding of offending behaviour. If instead we consider the behaviour from a trauma perspective, the functions of this 'reluctance' to engage agentically with life reflects the significant challenges of exercising autonomy in the context of women's experiences.

## 6.5. Conclusion

Maier (1977) suggests that interpretations of women's offending tend to dichotomise their agency and self-determination. One approach ignores the gendered, classed, and raced world in which most criminalised women exist, over-emphasising their agency. The other denies women any agency at all, '*constituted by and through their status as victims, they are devoid of choice, responsibility, or accountability; fragments of social debris floundering in a theoretical tide of victimage*' (Maier 1977: 1). This highlights a key challenge for supporting processes that build agency and responsibility with women to help them sustain desistance. That is, how to build personal responsibility and autonomy while acknowledging the impact of their victimisation. As has been shown through the women's testimonies, victimisation and trauma can be devastating to the development of appropriate personal responsibility, autonomy, and agency, but they do not destroy it completely.

Desistance studies recognise that the individual's socio-economic circumstances impact on the ability to exercise agency and that setbacks in the desistance process are most likely to be the result of inequalities or structural barriers within the individual's social context (Healy, 2010; King 2012). This has particular resonance for women in the justice system who are often economically marginalised. However, their depiction of agency also has limitations when applied to women's desistance as it fails to account for the impact of trauma on autonomy.

In relation to women's desistance, feminist conceptualisations of agency can improve understanding of how agency and personal responsibility are experienced by women. Where they are more limited is the absence of attention to praxis, how to translate these feminist understandings of agency into practice that can support women to exercise positive and meaningful agency over their lives.

Understandings of the impact of trauma on personal responsibility can inform how interventions in the justice system can empower women to develop autonomy and responsibility (Elliot et al., 2005; Bloom and Covington, 1998). Trauma-informed approaches work to help women understand the limits of their responsibility and the extent of their

autonomy. The concept of responsibility in trauma theory consciously stands in unequivocal opposition to notions of blame. An empowerment approach seeks to increase women's power in personal and social spheres with an understanding of why accessing this responsibility is difficult for women (Courtois, 2004; Elliot et al. 2005; Herman, 1992/2015). From this perspective, building women's agency could be supported through trauma-informed approaches that provide a framework for helping women understand agency and personal responsibility within a relational approach that acknowledges the personal and structural constraints to autonomy.

### **Principles for practice:**

#### **Developing personal responsibility and autonomy competencies**

This study's analysis of the women's experiences and understandings of personal responsibility concludes that this aspect of desistance may be supported in the following ways, which are advocated in research on trauma-informed practice:

- by having empowerment as the core goal of intervention (Harris and Fallot, 2001)
- by helping women distinguish between blame and responsibility (Harris and Fallot, 2001)
- by seeking to increase women's power in personal and social spheres through genuinely collaborative relationships between the woman and the practitioner (Herman, 1992/2015, Harris and Fallot, 2001).
- by working to reduce the barriers to the exercise of agency, including those that are structural, psychological, and imposed by the justice system (Covington and Bloom, 1998)
- through education about the broader socio-political context and the ways in which it limits women's autonomy (Elliot et al., 2005)



## 9. Recovery:

### A trauma recovery approach to supporting women's desistance

In this chapter, the data will be used to put forward a framework for supporting women's desistance. In recent years, desistance theories have been translated into policy and practice principles that have started to influence how criminal justice agencies work with individuals trying to leave crime behind. A review conducted for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) (McNeill and Weaver, 2010) concluded that in order to promote desistance, a key focus for practitioners should be accommodating and exploiting identity and diversity (see also, Rex and Hosking, 2013). However, despite increased theorising, practice guidance, and positive evaluation of gender-responsive approaches (Evans, 2018; Gelsthorpe, 2009; Gelsthorpe and McIvor, 2007; Messina, et al., 2014; Petrillo et al., 2019; Saxena et al., 2014), there has been limited specific examination of how gender-responsive or trauma-informed practice might support women's desistance (an exception being Gelsthorpe et al's., 2007 report). As outlined in chapter two, desistance-based practice approaches are commonly presented as gender-neutral. However, this research shows the desistance processes of managing relationships, restoring a sense of identity, and developing agency and appropriate responsibility all have significant gendered dimensions, particularly related to experiences of abuse. Broad principles allow room for practice to be responsive to an individual's circumstances, however a lack of specificity risks erasing gender-specific areas of need, such as those related to victimisation and trauma.

During the initial phase of coding the data, themes related to recovery were coded as part of broader themes around 'drugs,' 'alcohol,' 'therapy,' and 'support.' These had sub-themes relating to treatment including 'experiences of treatment' 'personal external support,' and 'professional external support.' 'Experiences of prison' were initially coded separately owing to their prevalence, both positive and negative, in the women's narratives around support and recovery. An initial code labelled 'fear' was also significant to this theme in relation to release as this revealed the types of support women identified as lacking during their

transition from prison to the community. During focused coding, these themes were condensed into different types of support the women identified as important to their desistance, these were 'experiences of prison,' 'experiences of probation,' professional external support,' and 'personal support networks.' The theoretical coding phase consolidated these themes within Herman's (1992/2015) broad framework for trauma recovery, 'establishing safety,' 'emotional processing,' and 'reconnecting' [Appendix C(i-iii)].

This chapter examines the women's narratives in order to understand the support they need to desist from crime. It applies gender-responsive, trauma-informed principles to their observations to translate their understanding of the nature of desistance work into principles for practice within a trauma recovery framework. It begins with an examination of posttraumatic resilience as a driver and goal of recovery. This is followed by a brief review of desistance-based practice in correctional settings and a comparison of recovery, desistance, and trauma models of intervention. The chapter then presents an analysis of how the women establish and sustain physical, emotional, and psychological safety, and the role of criminal justice and other professional service provision to this. Next, the 'emotional processing' theme is examined through the women's reflections on the types of structured therapeutic interventions they have found most helpful to their recovery. The final theme of 'reconnection' explores the women's experiences of transitioning from prison to the community and the ways in which they reconnect with the world. Generalised principles for practice are important as the foundations on which to build an approach that can respond to women's needs. However, criminal justice practitioners are unlikely to have all the skills and resources required to fully support women through each stage of recovery, therefore some detail is included on the types of intervention that may be helpful at each stage of the process.

## 9.1. Posttraumatic resilience and recovery

Chapter three outlines the ways in which both gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches provide frameworks for practice that complement those advanced by the desistance research. Desistance, recovery, and trauma-informed approaches are strengths-based models of practice (Best, Irving and Albertson, 2017; Terry and Cardwell, 2015). They

rely on identifying and building upon people's existing strengths and resources. Reviewing my reflective diary during the coding process revealed that I was repeatedly struck by the women's ability to survive the experiences that had marked their lives. Their resilience stood out as a key strength. Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990: 426) define resilience as '*the process of, or capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances.*' The women did not directly name resilience themselves, but their stories revealed a capacity to transform posttraumatic pain into strength (Bloom, 1997/2013), something I reflected on early in the research process.

When talking about her experiences I was reminded of the amazing capacity women who come into prison have to survive and retain hope in their lives. More than that, to really reflect on their experiences and take responsibility for their futures. Despite everything, D was as reflective, thoughtful and hopeful. I felt really privileged to meet her and it gave me even more faith in women's ability to survive (reflective diary 07/08/2013).

Seminal studies in resilience (for example, Bonanno, 2004; Garmezy, 1993; Werner and Smith, 1992) shifted the focus of resilience theories that had framed responses to stressors as a catalogue of risk and vulnerability factors related to disadvantage. They concentrated instead on protective factors; the resources, social, and psychological characteristics of those who were able to overcome adversity. This shift in focus has been mirrored by desistance theorists in criminology who, rather than seeking out the 'problems' that contribute to offending, sought the social and psychological factors that support desistance. Resilience refers to positive change despite odds against successful development. In common with desistance, resilience denotes a process of overcoming adversity that has personal, cognitive, and social elements (Masten et al. 1990). Consequently, resilience is useful to explore both as a theoretical framework through which to analyse women's recovery processes and as a protective factor in the journey to desistance.

Studies support the idea that normal human psychological development includes the ability to re-establish equilibrium following disruption of the development processes, such as those caused by prolonged trauma (Masten et al., 1990). Tasha's comments exemplify how naturally human resilience activates to support survival, even in the most threatening of situations.

I fought all the way through it... Everyone is like, how have you managed all these years? It's like, you've got to, you've got to go through it, everyone has got to go through it at some stage. But then, I keep thinking at the back of my mind, there's people out there that are worse off than me, so I can't moan, that's how I cope (Tasha).

However, significantly for women in the criminal justice system, this self-righting mechanism can be damaged by severe childhood adversity. Importantly, Masten et al. (1990) state that protective factors do not necessarily yield resilience. They concede that if the vulnerability of the individual or the severity of the adversity is too great, protective processes may not be adequate. Risk factors that can reduce resilience are cited as poverty, minority status, lower social class, neglect, anti-social behaviour by parents, and experiencing traumatic events (Masten, et al., 1990). However, most notable for this project is the impact of childhood adversity,

*'Resilience is the exception when adversity seriously impedes the quality of care-giving needed by the child. Severe interference in parental care can result from lack of opportunity to form specific attachments, from impaired functioning in the caregivers or from abusive treatment or neglect by caregivers'* (Masten et al., 1990: 438).

In recognition of different coping mechanisms, O'Leary and Ickovics (1995), note different levels to resilient responses; survival, recovery, or thriving. At its most basic, resilience is an ability to maintain or restore physical, emotional, and psychological equilibrium when the integrity of the self is under threat (Masten et al., 1990). At the level of survival, the individual is able to function, but their functioning may be impaired by negative forms of coping (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995; Van Vliet, 2008). Recovery is conceptualised as the individual resuming levels of social and psychological functioning that preceded the disruption. Individuals demonstrate the third response, thriving, when their recovery enables them to grow beyond their original level of psycho-social functioning (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995; Richardson and Waite, 2002). At its most sophisticated, resilience is transformative and generative, it denotes an ability to absorb adversity and use it to grow (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995).

Despite the women's reliance on what could be deemed dysfunctional or maladaptive coping symbolic of the survival level (see chapter eight), their stories were peppered with examples of the growth through adversity indicative of thriving. Maeve's progress with her drug detoxification generated increased feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy.

I've worked really hard and like, even detoxing has been hard for me, oh my god, I felt so rough, I was tempted, because I could have gone back on methadone anytime, and I was going to and then I thought, no. I'm nearly there now. I might as well just see it through, so I'm nearly there now. I'm pleased with myself for that (Maeve).

A challenge in nurturing resilience to support desistance is that the criminal justice system often only acknowledges the women's survival efforts as resilience once they have stopped offending and have 'changed.' When labelled an offender, behaviours that are enabling the women to survive are interpreted as maladaptive signifiers of risk. The stories the women in this project told revealed that they do not become resilient on cessation of their offending, resilience is a quality that is within them despite their offending and can, in fact, manifest through their offending (Österman, 2018; see also, chapter eight). The first challenge in relation to harnessing the women's resilience to support desistance is that often, the behaviours that enable them to survive, their acts of resilience, were also factors that contributed to their offending.

Resilience featured in these women's lives from childhood. Not all of the women quoted here desisted from crime or crime-related behaviours once released, but that does not negate their resilience. Indeed, the ordinariness of their resilience was striking.

You know what? Every day's a different day. You've just got to try, try, try. Even if it don't work out. You try again (Dawn, FU1).

Their experiences also suggest that differentiations in levels of resiliency are limited when applied to this group. For these women, merely surviving can be 'heroic,' (O'Leary and Ickovics, 1995: 430), but may involve drug use or self-harm. Coping can hinder as well as promote recovery. Growth through adversity and the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural transformation it implies are common, but they do not necessarily denote thriving. In supporting women's desistance, recognising manifestations of resilience and strength,

celebrating it in all its forms, including anti-social behaviour, and finding ways to build it in a way that supports healing are a foundation for supporting desistance, as Janelle eloquently stated,

I think even when you feel the lowest you can feel in life, there is always a little spark there inside all of us, it's just what brings it out... (Janelle).

## 9.2. Desistance and recovery in relation to trauma

This research has illustrated that the changes women want to make to their lives after prison are rarely framed as striving to terminate offending behaviours. Instead, 'success' is defined as building positive relationships, addressing substance use problems, stabilising mental health difficulties, and achieving a normal life (see also, Heidemann et al., 2016). The legitimacy of applying the concept of recovery to desistance from offending behaviour has been questioned on the basis of its associations with medical models of treatment and its presumption of a prior state of well-being (McNeill, 2006). However, as this research has shown, most women in prison are attempting not only to desist from crime, but also to recover from trauma symptoms, substance dependency, and mental health problems. Recognising the interaction of substance dependency, mental illness, and offending, the fields of recovery and desistance have started to consider what each can offer the other (Terry and Cardwell, 2015). There are several points of congruence in the fields. Both emphasise the importance of identity transformation, both require a level of individual motivation supported by positive social networks, both understand psychological change as accompanied by mechanisms of informal social control and generative activities. Both understand the role of the worker to be that of a therapeutic agent of change who works with, rather than on, the client/service user; brokering access to services and supporting the individual to develop hope and agency (Best et al., 2017; Terry and Cardwell, 2015). Research has suggested that formalised intervention in both fields is of lesser importance than practical support and a meaningful service user/practitioner relationship (Best et al., 2017; Farrall et al., 2014; McNeill and Weaver, 2010; Rex, 1999).

In their review of the literature on desistance and recovery, Terry and Cardwell (2015) pose the important question of what people are recovering from. They cite shame, stigma, institutionalisation, addiction, but not specifically trauma or prolonged abuse, despite the well-documented correlations between this, addiction, mental illness, and offending (Covington, 2008; Gelsthorpe and Wright, 2015). As the women in this study have revealed, sex, gender, and their experiences of trauma have an impact on all areas of their lives associated with desistance and recovery, yet neither field has attempted to integrate gender-responsive, trauma-informed approaches into service provision for women in the justice system (Rumgay, 2004a; Gelsthorpe and McIvor, 2007).

Recovery from complex trauma has been conceptualised as a three-stage model; *establishing safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection* (Herman, 1992a, 1992/2015). The first stage establishes physical, affective, and psychological safety, as these are fundamental requirements for any subsequent therapeutic work. In the second stage, the survivor tells her story of trauma, in order to reconstruct and transform the memories, so they can be integrated into her life narrative. In the third stage of recovery, the survivor starts to reconnect with ordinary life and plan for her future (Herman 1992/2015; Covington, 1998, 2007). Notwithstanding Herman's acknowledgement that the simplicity implied in this recovery process is a '*convenient fiction*' (1992/2015: 155), this research suggests the model provides a framework for how criminal justice practitioners can support women's desistance during and post-imprisonment that draws together principles for practice from desistance and trauma recovery, thus responding to the gender and trauma-related experiences that the woman identified as important to their efforts to desist from crime.

### 9.3. Establishing safety

Establishing safety does not feature explicitly as a component of desistance-based approaches to practice, however it is a foundational element of both trauma-informed and gender-responsive approaches (Herman 1992/2015; Bloom and Covington, 1998).

### 9.2.1. Establishing physical safety

Several themes from the interviews for this research relate to embodiment in a way that has not previously been identified in the desistance literature. Chapter six examined the women's sense of their vulnerability, the different ways in which they were exposed to harm and how these are associated with their offending and attempts at personal change. Chapter seven revealed the physicality of women's shame and stigma and how this can impact on the restoring a coherent identity. Chapter eight examined how the women's experiences of bodily violation distorted notions of personal responsibility and autonomy. Consequently, it has been noted that supporting women's desistance should include principles for practice that respond to the physicality of their experiences, including helping them to establish safety and gain control of their bodies.

The pre-release interviews explored the women's hopes and concerns about release and were revealing in terms of how unsafe many of the women felt about returning to the community. Everything about Charlene's concerns below reveals her sense of physical danger associated with her release.

I'm shitting myself because it's, like, I'm getting fired at from left, right and centre. And I used to dodge bullets, now I'm getting grazed, as it would be (Charlene).

Charlene's depiction of danger as embodied emphasises that establishing safety means first establishing physical safety (Courtois and Ford, 2016; Elliot et al., 2005; Herman 1992/2015; van der Kolk, 2014).

Essentially, a safe environment is one which is away from the abuser(s), secure, ideally with 24/7 support, and systems to provide crisis intervention (Bloom, 1997/2013). Safe environments are organised to minimise exposure to disturbing material (Courtois and Ford, 2016; Elliot et al., 2005). Interpersonal interactions, particularly between staff and service users should provide the five conditions of trauma-informed care: safety, trustworthiness, collaboration, choice, and empowerment (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Ideally, the safe space is a 'sanctuary' (Bloom, 1997/2013) that provides physical, emotional, and psychological respite



(Bloom, Bennington-Davis, Farragher, McCorkle, Nice-Martini and Wellbank, 2003). 'Home' and 'the community' have often not been safe environments for women in the justice system as they have been the places where the trauma has been enacted (Herman, 1992/2015). Therefore, it should not perhaps have been surprising that many of the women in this study identified prison as a place of safety that provided them with the space to begin to heal and change.

...when I first come to prison I was like, yeah, this is good, I had three meals a day, roof over my head, people to talk to, I was like, yeah...I do think it works in that way, definitely, like there's a lot of groups and that, I go to domestic violence group, Safer Choices<sup>28</sup>, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, there's a lot of support like that (Ruby).

I'm safe in jail. I'm safer in jail. I have support in jail. I have all the support in the world in jail (Jane, initial interview).

Scholars of women's imprisonment have drawn attention to the ways in which prison inflicts gendered physical, emotional, and psychological pain on women (Bumiller, 2013; Crewe et al., 2017). Prison does not meet their physical health needs, particularly those related to menstruation, pregnancy, child birth, and menopause (Corston, 2007; Carlen and Worrall, 2004). Women's bodies are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault and exploitation. Regimes, education, and training opportunities rarely provide meaningful skills and experiences that will enable them to overcome an economic reality that discriminates against women (Carlen and Worrall, 2004; Corston, 2007). Women's mental health, substance misuse, and trauma-related symptoms are usually left untreated. Women are particularly harmed by separation from children. As Evans (2018: 37) concludes, *'all of this makes prison unbearable for women.'*

For these reasons, prison as a 'place of safety' is a thorny idea for feminists in criminology. The criminal justice system is patriarchal and, arguably, misogynistic, and prison is the most hyper-masculine display of its potency and dominance. Prison regimes are founded on hierarchy, domination, suppression, punishment, and violence and are therefore, it is argued, re-traumatizing and disempowering (Heney and Kristiansen, 1998). Prisons are

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<sup>28</sup> Safer Choices is a support group in prisons for people who self-harm.

fundamentally unable to address systemic, intersecting disadvantage that compounds women's criminalisation. Indeed, there is substantial research indicating that women's imprisonment is itself criminogenic (Baldry, 2010; Maidment, 2006). The disproportionately high levels of self-harm, the 'gender paradox' (Dye, 2011: 291) in suicide rates among women in prison, and the apparent culpability of the criminal justice and prison regimes in some of these deaths<sup>29</sup> all give lie to the idea of prison as a 'safe space.'

That said, as hard as it is to accept against what is known about the harms prison inflicts on women, most of the women in this research identified coming to prison as having 'saved' them in some way. Whilst most identified negative aspects of the prison environment, these overwhelmingly referred to practical constraints such as cell sharing, bad food, the cost of phone-calls, difficulty accessing services, and boredom. Of the women in the study, only Karina mentioned any anxiety about personal safety,

Very challenging, and especially like...yeah, around men, as well, I feel quite worried sometimes. I don't feel the safest with new guys being around, especially, like, when you're sleeping, and it just...it is a bit scary (Karina).

In our first follow up session, Lynne reflected on the role of prison in helping her address the harmful behaviours she was engaged in at the time of her offence.

I felt safe in there...It was the best thing that happened to me going in there, going in prison, ... it, sort of, give me time to find myself. Not drinking because I couldn't get hold of drink... you know, a lot of the time I was quite happy in there, because I was helping other people and all, and helping myself, but, yeah, it was the best thing that happened to me really in there, I suppose it saved me really (Lynne, FU1).

The safety that prison provided these women reveals more perhaps about the lack of safety in their lives outside than the safety of the prison. Lynne, Jane, and Ruby had all experienced repeated physical and sexual abuse and resulting substance use and mental health problems throughout their lives. Against this backdrop, prison may indeed be safer than their 'homes.'

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, inquests into the deaths of Sarah Reed and Charlotte Noakes.

The women also spoke of seeking out other institutional-type spaces as safe spaces, for example in their need for residential substance or mental health treatment. Between our first and second follow-up sessions, Amy was moved from supported accommodation for people with mental health issues to an unsupported hostel, where she relapsed into drug use and prostitution/sex work, and was eventually recalled to prison.

There was no support with the mental health... There was no places where if you're sinking, like going into depression like I was, there is no support for mental health people out there. There is no society. There is no groups... Somewhere where I could be safe, somewhere where I can work on me and get like, you know, back to my old ways. That's what I want (Amy, FU2).

In relation to supporting desistance, the message from the women in this research is that a safe space is somewhere where they can, at least initially, have time away from their lives to focus on their recovery. It is challenging to accommodate the idea that prison can feel safe to the women, whilst also exacerbating the conditions that contribute to their involvement in the justice system; that it can be therapeutic for some, as it was for many women in this research, yet life-threatening for others (Inquest, 2018). That said, as Gelsthorpe (2010) argues, women's positive experiences of systems of punishment cannot be simply dismissed as '*false consciousness*' (p.382). As Amy rightly perceived, in the current socio-political context that has decimated health and welfare services, with particularly severe impacts on women's services (Wakefield, 2019), prison is one of the few 'spaces' left that can serve this purpose. These women's experiences reiterate the enduring fusion of concepts of welfare and punishment in response to women's offending (Gelsthorpe, 2009, 2010).

This research suggests gender is important to how safe women perceive spaces within the justice system to be. Prison is by no means a 'women-only' space, but here Catherine contrasts it positively with probation, where she felt unsafe specifically as a female in a predominantly male environment.

It's women and the men, it's different. I'm a criminal, right, but, I don't know, it's just different. If there were all women in there, it would be different, than all men in there, because men seem to look at you, like, you're a woman, what are you doing in here? And, like, when you go into the probation office there's people outside smoking and drinking, and you're going in there, and you're just, like, oh fuck. It's different, it is, I've never seen a woman in that probation office, there's never, ever been a woman in there, I've only seen men, loads of them (Catherine, FU1).

In relation to desistance, the notion of '*transcarceral*' spaces as safe is problematic (Carlton and Baldry, 2013: 61). Indeed, institutionalisation increases vulnerability and Lynne, Janine, and Jane all reflected on whether it was as a result of institutionalisation that they were able to thrive in custody. However, when asked what they needed to help them sustain desistance, many of the women identified the need to be released to residential treatment, be that for substance misuse or mental health problems. Miriam was housed in a hostel on release which met many of the criteria for a safe space specified by trauma-informed practice (Harris and Fallot, 2001; Bloom, 1997/2013). There was round the clock support, the building was physically secure, it was away from people and places associated with her offending, though still within visiting distance of her grandmother and son. Importantly, she felt the staff genuinely cared about her well-being.

They're for you, when I come in in the evening, because it's a hostel, and it's monitored, and there's someone there 24 hours. So, when I come in, they'll say, are you alright Miriam, or whatever. But I like it, because it makes you know that someone cares about you, or they're looking out for you (Miriam, FU1).

Janelle also anticipated being released to similar supported accommodation and this felt essential to her sustaining desistance.

The housing place that I've been put forward to, they specialise in counselling, drug help, give you all that, you're given a support with a key worker, you have sessions. Anything that you'll need help with, like, my benefits will be all out of shape, and that, I'm going to need a new doctor when I'm moving out of borough, things like that, and they saw the few other people that I did have in my social network before, even though I'm moving to a new borough, they still interact with me, so it's not like I'm going to meet new people all over again by myself. I've got counselling to go to, they're recommending me for CBT<sup>30</sup> and DBT<sup>31</sup>, things that will help me...(Janelle).

Maeve identified safe accommodation as striking a balance between providing support and opportunities for independence.

...where I'm going to live, there's support there, the staff are there 24 hours and they're good, they're really good and I think I do like that, because it makes me feel a bit more, like, I've got that support from when I first come out, instead of going straight into somewhere on my own, but it is, like, you've got your own little studio flat, but you've still got the staff downstairs and there's only, like, I think five women that live there and we've all got our own little places (Maeve).

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<sup>30</sup> Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

<sup>31</sup> Dialectal Behaviour Therapy

As Maeve, Janelle, and Miriam's comments reveal, what these institutional spaces offer is safety, support, manageable responsibility, and structure that is missing from their everyday lives. This research shows that women's understanding of what constitutes a physically safe environment corresponds with both trauma-informed and gender-responsive criteria for safe recovery spaces (Courtois and Ford, 2016; Harris and Fallot, 2001, Elliot et al., 2005; Herman 1992/2015; Gelsthorpe, Sharpe and Roberts, 2007).

### 9.3.2. Emotional safety

Many women also experienced prison as a place of emotional safety. Critical feminist perspectives argue that a correctional paradigm cannot be therapeutic. It fundamentally reinforces the gendered marginalisation that traps women in cycles of imprisonment and community-based interventions, reproducing systems of marginalisation, oppression, and disadvantage that shape processes of criminalisation (Carlton and Baldry, 2013; McCorkel, 2013; Potter, 2015). However, the women's reflections on prison both pre- and post-release identified elements of prison that provide emotional safety. It can be a necessary 'time out' of their lives to get clean, form relationships with people who share some of their experiences, and start working towards recovery and change.

Bette: I had a lot of demons, but I think I needed this year to be on my own away from all the stresses, away from the life in the hostels, away from [psychiatric outpatient treatment], it's not a nice place. I remember at first, when I first went back to court, the judge said, she needs to go back to [psychiatric services], I went, no way, send me back to prison, I'm not going there, I'm not going there and they sent me back. So it is, for me, it's been, like, not a holiday, but, like...

Madeline: A bit of respite.

Bette: Yeah, like therapy.

In order to establish an environment of emotional safety in which trauma and its associated symptoms can start to be addressed, the interpersonal interactions within that space must be gender-responsive and trauma-informed (Bloom, 1997/2013; Harris and Fallot, 2001). When the women spoke of relationships with professionals that felt safe, they had common elements. They identified that 'good' practitioners expressed genuine concern, demonstrated

a belief that they could change, showed resilience when progress faltered, and worked collaboratively with them. These positive therapeutic relationships were a source of emotional support for the women.

And then I've got M, which is my drug worker on the out, I've known her for years. She's one of the good, good, good...one of the ones that just ain't going to give up. And I come into jail, I mess up. I say, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. And she'll help me again. If I didn't have her in my life, I think I would have broke down a lot sooner. Because like, when I'm out there, even when I'm on drugs, she's, like, don't worry, just come and see me, it's alright, we can sort this...She really wants me to change (Misha).

The desistance literature has conceptualised the supervisory relationship as an alliance with both parties engaged in the co-production of desistance (Weaver, 2013). An attachment framework adds to those definitions the idea that the supervisory relationship can have an emotional element and provide a degree of psychological safety (Ansbro, 2019).

Bloom et al's. (2003) guidance for trauma-informed correctional services stresses staffing and training as core issues. Practitioner actions may inadvertently parallel interpersonal dynamics that recall and exacerbate trauma responses (Elliot et al., 2005). Therefore, interactions within a safe space must foster growth and change, recognising the potential for re-traumatisation in organisational processes and regimes. Correctional practitioners must seek to empower women by understanding the relationships of dominance and subordination that can be reproduced in systems of punishment and striving to redress them (Elliot et al., 2005; Evans, 2018). Therefore, service users' relationship with each other and with practitioners must be driven by compassion and empathy (Harris and Fallot, 2001). Principles for trauma-informed practice demands that practitioners have a holistic understanding of the woman and the gendered personal, social, and economic vulnerabilities that provide the backdrop to her law-breaking (Bloom and Covington, 1998; Corston, 2007; Evans, 2018). The value of consistency in these relationships to the women's emotional well-being is explained by Tasha.

Talking to someone every week, knowing I'm going to be talking to someone about my problems, and trying to get over it. Because, all this time I've blocked it out and not spoken to anyone about it. So, every week I'm going to be talking to two, or maybe three, lots of people that makes me feel better (Tasha)

An important element of recovery from trauma is that women understand their responses are normal reactions, given their experiences (Bloom and Covington, 2008; van der Kolk, 2014). Survivors need to have their experiences heard and validated (Elliot et al., 2005). In custody, this validation often came from peers, as Abi and Katy explain,

Like, being in prison, it's a bad thing obviously because it's a punishment, but it has helped me an awful lot because of the stories, and there's a lot of people that are in my same situation or have had the same problems, so they're helping me through it as well (Abi).

I can't wait to go home but the thing is, I'm in two minds. Because they've been lovely to me here, even the girls even, you know. So now I've got to go back there, to an empty flat, with that lot. Deep down, I'd rather stay here because they've been so nice to me, you know... they're so helpful here, it's unbelievable. I mean, being officers, you'd think they'd be really strict kind of thing. They are strict but they also help, they're also there all the time (Katy)

Bloom (1997/2013) comments on the importance of using the '*community as a container for overwhelming emotions*' (p. 141) and it is clear from the women's comments that they use each other, and some staff, for this purpose. However, the prison regime does not support the maintenance of these relationships, as Janelle explains,

...and this moving people up and down in the prison system, I don't think that's helpful, because, like, I know for me personally, if I build up a bond with one officer, there's certain things I might tell her that can help me, that I wouldn't tell another officer if I was just to be moved onto another landing, because I wouldn't have that bond. Right, there's a lot of upheaval in the system that doesn't help...(Janelle).

These relationships provide emotional safety as they counter the loneliness and isolation that can result from complex trauma that features strongly in the women's narratives. In custody, the regime and the relationships with other women and staff provide a structure that can reduce feelings of isolation. Therefore, reproducing this structure and support in the community is important to supporting women's desistance. These validating relationships were much harder for them to come by on release.

I was saying to [my keyworker] the other day, you need somebody who's been in jail to understand how you feel...I miss the girls. Miss the girls. You've lived with 40 people and then you've lived with 30 people and now all of a sudden you don't live with anyone. I went, it's hard (Jane, FU1).

For those who had positive relationships with their Probation Officers, they were cited as a source of validation and, overall, a safe relationship. Amy described her Probation Officer as a 'really, really, really good Probation Officer,' giving an example of her spending five hours at the housing office with her, as well as helping her access her benefits, giving her foodbank vouchers, and explaining to Amy that she has a duty of care to her. However, despite Amy's obvious gratitude and trust in her Probation Officer, there remained aspects of the relationship that felt unsafe, and because of this she felt she needed external support.

I have a really, really good support network with my probation officer but it's like I can't really discuss what I'm actually going through, like on a personal level. If I'm going through a psychotic mode, because I'm worried it might affect me. It could spark off a flare for concern because I'm with the IOM place now, so it's got to the next level. I told her I don't know if it's getting me into any more trouble, she said it's not going to get you into any more trouble but basically they should do something about my counselling... (Amy, FU1)

Findings from a recent study into women's experiences of recall that found, like Amy, women tended to avoid disclosing personal problems to probation for fear it would result in further punishment (Prison Reform Trust, 2018). Reflecting this, several of the women in the follow-up sessions spoke, unprompted, of the need for women's groups they could attend on release,<sup>32</sup> further highlighting the conflict arising from women's access to support being bound up with the apparatus of punishment (Gelsthorpe, 2010).

there really should be more, even for women before they actually go in prison, to keep...how can I put it...because a lot of crime is due to not having enough money and nothing to do, nowhere to go, you know. Just women not men though, because there is a lot of places that women just need to go and be able to express their self without men, you know, obviously you've got domestic abuse which, thank God I got through that...but people just generally talking and having a cup of coffee, somewhere just to go just to meet up if they're feeling, sort of, down one day, think, oh, I'll go there, you know, something like that...(Lynne, FU1)

...they don't understand the mess of being in jail, coming out, and then trying to get back into your life. You just slip back into old ways, but if someone was there more regularly, that knew about jail, and about these kinds of different things, it would be different. I speak to Elishima, I'm in contact with her now she's out. So, that's nice, because someone else knows about it... (Catherine, FU1).

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<sup>32</sup> Aside from Lynne and Catherine, Amy and Rina also commented that having informal, women-only, group spaces would have been helpful to their resettlement. Relatedly, Frankie mentioned peer-led resettlement groups as important for pre-release preparation.



During the first stage of recovery, an additional task in establishing emotional safety is to help women develop and access alternatives to coping mechanisms that exacerbate symptoms of trauma (Bloom and Covington, 2008; Covington and Russo, 2016; Elliot et al., 2005).

Being in prison meant many of the women terminated coping behaviours such as drug use, but there were few examples of them learning to replace them with alternative coping strategies. The epidemic levels of self-harm amongst women in prison (Ministry of Justice, 2019) are perhaps testimony to the absence of resources to help women cope with the issues that underlie addiction. As was illustrated in chapter eight, many of the women were relying on their personal determination, perseverance, and strength to sustain changes.

Emotional support – that’s all I need. I don’t need no other kind of help, because everything else, if I had that, then I can do everything else myself. That’s the only thing that will motivate me, knowing that someone is there by my side helping me. Like I’m not asking someone to watch out for me 24/7. Just be there when I need them. It’s not about calling someone when you’re emotional and you need to talk and they’re telling you to book a visit for next week (Neneh).

Providing emotional safety and teaching coping skills is identified in this research as important to supporting desistance processes. This further problematizes the notion of prison as a safe space, as the prisons often take a punitive response to expressions of emotional dysregulation. Criminal justice interventions largely focus on cognitive development as opposed to emotional management. Therapeutic interventions, such as DBT and MBT, are limited in the custodial estate.

### 9.2.3. Psychological safety

Another feature of establishing safety is to support women in developing psychological safety. This refers to the ability to *‘be safe within oneself, to rely on one’s own ability to self-protect against any destructive impulses coming from within oneself or deriving from other people’* (Bloom, 1997/2013: 132).

Herman (1992/2015) explains that the process of establishing safety may be impeded or thwarted completely if the survivor encounters an unprotected environment or the process is

interrupted, for example, by release. During the pre-release interviews, most of the women expressed some level of anxiety about release.

And, so many things have gone my way, because I've been doing education, associating on my landing, so not many things have gone into my head. Whereas, when I get out of there, I'm really scared that it's all going to come back into my head again. I don't think my life is going to...I don't know, when I get out of here it's just going to go back to square one I think. I'm hoping it doesn't but that's what I'm wary of, everything going back to square one, I'm going to end up back in hospital, I don't want to be like that, I want to move on from this (Tasha).

Tasha's comments return to concerns about lack of structure, stimulation, and the fear of being isolated on release. Trauma returns when the women are alone.

To develop psychological safety and capacities for self-protection, the women expressed the importance of understanding how their experiences of victimisation are associated with their offending and criminogenic behaviours, as Kim explains,

I need help, but it still wasn't given, and until I came into Holloway, after several weeks, I've seen somebody to actually talk to find a...you know, the real thing to my actual problem and how to help myself and how to go on from that and how to get myself out of that situation. Because it's good saying you're not going to offend, it's good saying you're going out there and you're going straight, but when anything hits you, it could be anything, you understand me? It doesn't...it's not just easy to go and say, I will do it (Kim).

Theories of trauma recovery, in common with desistance, advocate continuity and consistency of treatment. However they also specify the importance of safety/crisis planning, psychoeducational groups that educate the women about the nature and impact of trauma, cognitive behavioural therapy, and support developing self-care routines (Herman 1992/2015; Bloom and Covington, 1998).

The prison regime with its regular timetable, work placements, organised leisure activities such as the library and arts and crafts sessions, the availability of the gym and pool for exercise, scheduled recreation, and enforced abstinence from illegal drugs and alcohol all helped the women establish healthier self-care routines than they were used to in the community. Many of the women commented on how prison helped them in this area of their lives.

In some ways it's been nice because I've had a bit of time to myself and I've had thinking time. Although you don't have thinking time because you're always in here [reducing reoffending department] and you're always doing something, you still can go to the gym, you can still go swimming, you can choose what education you want to do (Catherine, initial interview).

Despite the limitations in traditional general cognitive behaviour programmes identified in both desistance and gender-responsive critiques (Covington and Bloom, 1999; Evans, 2018; Worrall and Gelsthorpe, 2009; Kendall, 2002; McNeill and Weaver, 2010; Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004), the women who had participated in these identified them as contributing to a feeling of psychological safety. They helped develop problem solving, perspective taking, and consequential thinking skills which they believed would be of benefit in sustaining change.

...it's all to do with my course as well, TSP<sup>33</sup>, that I done and that had a really good impact in the way that I think and the way that I do things. Everything that I do I always think before I act now. I never go to do something without thinking....Everything that I go to do, every decision that I'm going to make, I always see what is going to happen with whatever answer that I give, and then if it's not a good one I change and find another way to deal with things (Alyssa)

I'm doing a lot of groups in here that have helped me through coping strategies with my drug and my criminal offending. Because although they are linked together due to the habit, they are different as well, because I do offending without a drug habit, you know. ....So I've learnt an awful lot about my victims and everything like that, which has made me think before I act now (Abi).

However, the key component of both gender-responsive and trauma-informed approaches to empower women through education about the prevalence and impacts of prolonged victimisation and the legitimacy of their responses were missing. This meant it was hard for the women to fully understand, and consequently exercise agency over their behaviours.

It's like when you're sick. If you don't know what your symptoms are you're not going to be able to get the right medication to heal the symptoms but once you know that you've got a throat infection then you know what you can go and get and you need to fix that throat infection. Right about now it seems like I've got an infection but I just don't know what that infection is in order for me to get the right medication for it...and they just haven't been able to do those things for me in prison (Alyssa).

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<sup>33</sup> Thinking Skills Programme

Jane explained the challenges of trying to work on symptoms of trauma that have been factors in her offending when physical, emotional and psychological safety has not first been established.

It's like throwing you to the wolves; that's what it's like. It is. Like I say, I think you need to deal with things while you're in custody because otherwise you can't move forward. I'm dealing with things, like my domestic violence and that, that really could've been done, should've been done while I was in while I was in custody, but it wasn't (Jane, FU1).

Establishing physical, emotional, and psychological safety should put supports in place that will provide a foundation for the challenging, emotional processing work in phase two of the trauma recovery model. Practical support in finding safe accommodation, or at least safe spaces, away from the abuser, and linking women up to specialist services, such as women's centres and domestic abuse organisations, can help establish physical safety. Detailed safety planning is a crucial element of this stage for those still involved in relationships with abusers. Drug, alcohol, mental health treatment, and cognitive behavioural programmes can be important at this stage, as is helping the women to identify and mobilise people who can support her recovery journey.

### 9.3. Emotional processing

The second phase of trauma recovery is the period during which the survivor works through the story of her trauma in order to gain command over the experiences and ultimately, transform them so they can be safely incorporated into her life narrative (Courtois and Ford, 2016; Herman, 1992. 1992/2015). This stage was originally referred to by Herman (1992/2015: 175) as '*remembrance and mourning*,' but has also been explained as '*trauma memory*,' '*emotional processing*' (Courtois and Ford, 2016: 144) and '*retelling the story*' (Bloom and Covington, 1998: 13), all of which capture the essence of this phase as the survivor achieving a degree of control over the traumatic events and their impact on her life.

As has been shown, many of the coping mechanisms employed to survive prolonged trauma can have a detrimental impact on factors associated with desistance, namely an individual's relationships, selfhood, and their ability to exercise personal autonomy (Herman, 1992). Once

safety has been established, the next stage of recovery is to address symptoms of trauma that contribute to these adverse effects, such as dissociation, avoidance, emotional dysregulation, extreme emotional, physical, and psychological arousal, and intrusive traumatic memories, such as flashbacks and nightmares (Courtois and Ford, 2016).

The desistance research notes that translating theory into practice involves identifying processes of reform and support in the design of interventions that can enhance or complement efforts to change, yet detail on these processes and interventions remains lacking (McNeill, 2004; McNeill and Weaver, 2010). Work applying desistance paradigms to policy and practice focus on the significance of the practitioner/service user alliance (Rex 1999; Lewis, 2016), collaborative or co-produced intervention (Weaver, 2013), peer-mentoring (Brown and Ross, 2010), and strengths-based approaches such as the 'good lives model' (Ward and Brown, 2004) and skills for effective engagement, development, and supervision (SEEDS) (Rex and Hosking, 2013). These approaches focus on core processes of change, in contrast to the more rigid, targeted interventions of the effective practice era (for example, Chapman and Hough, 1998; Bonta and Andrews, 2010). McNeill explains that a desistance-focus in interventions *'implies a focus on the purpose and aspiration of the intervention rather than on the 'problem' that precipitates it'* (McNeill, 2004: 432). However, women in this study suggest that some form of structured, therapeutic intervention felt essential to them being able to engage in the processes of self-development required for successful desistance. The difference perhaps being that desistance approaches maintain a focus on addressing offending, whereas the women are concerned with addressing their victimisation. Here Jane comments on the support she received in the approved premises from other residents, but identifies limitations of this.

It wasn't a professional person; it was the women... But to be fair, as much as you sit and talk about it, you don't feel no better because you need somebody to help you, for you to move on. More support needs to be there. It does need to be there for women (Jane, FU1).

Working through experiences from their pasts was not experienced as being 'problem-focused,' but as empowering, a means of liberating them from these experiences (see also, Petrillo et al., 2019).

I carried on with that counselling place up until I was 18 years old and I did a weekly place with them. So all my aspects and the life changing things..., it was changing day

to day or week to week, I was talking it through with this lady, you know. So she had a lot to do with helping me through moving on from these people and moving on with my life, basically, you know. I never thought I'd be a counselling person (Abi).

Just someone to talk to, like outside the box. Not someone's that going to be judgmental and like, what's happened in the past. Because I've had like a really bad childhood, like myself sort of thing. And it was nice just to have someone else to talk to, that didn't know anything about like the situation. And someone that would have like a different sort of opinion on it (Adriana).

Interpretations of effective interventions based on desistance theory share a limitation with the effective practice approach when applied to women's recovery and desistance. The underlying question framing interventions remains '*what works?*' Gender-responsive, trauma-informed interventions have been designed instead from the question '*what is the work?*' (Covington and Bloom, 1999). Addressing the symptoms of trauma that contribute to women's offending requires a focus on the 'problem,' but not in the way this is conceptualised by either the effective practice or desistance frameworks. The work in this stage of the recovery and change process is to address the trauma and its manifestations in the women's lives. The women in this study were clear about what the work is. In contrast with the singular, future-orientation of desistance approaches, the women wanted help to understand the underlying issues they knew were contributing to their offending and crime-related behaviours.

I did two-to-one psychology, run by the guidelines of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation<sup>34</sup>.... It was supposed to be for a year and a half but I engaged so well, and I put all my everything into it because I needed to understand why I'd committed the crime. There were answers that I needed answering (Jane, initial interview).

I think, to stop people reoffending, because it happens in these intense emotions. And no one actually does any work, I don't think. Okay, so they do CBT counselling and psychotherapy but you've got to go right back to the start and actually make them learn how to grow up (Charlene).

...they say I've got mental health and I don't think I've got mental health. I think I've got issues and bad experiences and lots of regrets that build up to make your head feel like you've got mental health. but I haven't. I think I need to see a therapist. I don't think I should be on medication (Casey).

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<sup>34</sup> The Lucy Faithfull Foundation works to prevent the sexual abuse of children and young people by working with protective adults, perpetrators of abuse, and those affected by abuse: <https://www.lucyfaithfull.org.uk/>

Research studies are starting to evaluate different therapeutic approaches to addressing trauma symptoms related to offending (McKeown and Harvey, 2018). More research is needed specifically with women in the justice system, however some that are showing promising results in terms of reducing symptoms of trauma work to dilute the traumatic memory by controlled exposure to it, such as Exposure Therapy (ET) (Carey, 2011, Courtois and Ford, 2016) and Eye Movement Desensitisation Therapy (EMDT) (Shapiro, 2001; Soloman, Soloman and Heide, 2009). Others focus on coping and emotional regulation, such as Dialectal Behaviour Therapy (DBT) (Fonagy and Bateman, 2006; Nee and Farnam, 2007), or on psychoanalytic concepts, for example Mentalisation Based Therapy (MBT) (Bateman and Fonagy, 2008; McKeown and Harvey, 2018; Yakeley and Williams, 2014). These therapies are available in some correctional settings and should be considered especially for those women diagnosed with personality disorder who have histories of trauma.

Miller and Najavits (2012) comment that delivering therapeutic interventions such as those mentioned above within correctional environments can be problematic. They must be delivered by properly trained professionals. Otherwise, they risk emotionally destabilizing women who are already vulnerable, in settings where responses to such destabilisation are likely to be punitive (Miller and Najavits, 2012). They can be long-term, intensive treatments which are not practicable as part of a sentence, particularly as the majority of women are serving sentences of less than six months. In response, gender-responsive, trauma-informed interventions have been designed specifically for use in custodial or community treatment services for women in the justice system.<sup>35</sup> These are short duration, group interventions. Evaluation studies in the USA are consistently finding that gender-responsive, trauma-informed interventions with women in the justice system have positive outcomes in relation to reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD, trauma symptoms such as sleep disturbance and dissociation, and substance use (Covington, Burke, Keaton and Norcott, 2008; Frisman and Arisco, 2016; Messina et al, 2014; Messina, Braithwaite, Calhoun and Kubiak, 2016; Messina and Calhoun, 2018; Saxena, et al, 2014). Whilst their impact on

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<sup>35</sup> An example in the CJS in England and Wales is 'Healing Trauma.'

recidivism is yet to be established, they are showing positive effects on the processes related to desistance identified in this study.

The six-session Healing Trauma intervention is currently being run in women's prisons in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2018). A gender-responsive, trauma-informed intervention, it also responds to principles of desistance-based practice. It is peer-facilitated, specially trained prison staff train graduates of the programme to facilitate future sessions (Covington and Russo, 2016). The programme has yet to be fully evaluated, but a pilot evaluation found the women who participated in the intervention reported reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder, and trauma symptoms on completion of the programme (Petrillo et al., 2019). Powerful testimonies from participants demonstrated positive outcomes associated with trauma recovery and desistance, including empowerment, self-acceptance, and overcoming shame and stigma (Petrillo et al., 2019). Whilst the evaluation concurred with findings from desistance research, that relationships among group members and the environment in which the intervention takes place are important, positive effects were also the result of carefully constructed programme content that blends trauma theory, relational theory, addiction theory, and pathways theories to develop interventions that are based on women's experiences, rather than adaptations of programmes designed for men (Covington and Russo, 2016). The need for such interventions was commented on in this study,

I think a lot of the girls here need counselling as well to go with, because you can do offending behaviour and TSP, and all those things, teaching you coping skills, yeah, but for me personally, I know there's underlying reasons why I continue to smoke and continue to commit crime to smoke, you know, and I think, like, when you're on the wing, you get to speak to a lot of girls and find out that a lot of us have the same problems (Janelle).

As evaluations are showing, low or medium intensity trauma-informed programmes in the justice system can be sufficient to help some women emotionally process their experiences (Messina et al, 2014; Messina and Calhoun, 2018; Petrillo et al., 2019). For others, these interventions represent the start of much longer term work to assign the experiences of trauma to the past. This research sheds light on the lack of availability of structured therapeutic interventions in the community. Since 2015, the Ministry of Justice has part-



funded projects based on a 'whole systems approach,' (WSA) to divert money out of the criminal justice system and into local services in order to develop community provision for women (Ministry of Justice, 2018c). One of the most established projects in Greater Manchester includes self-referral, police referral, problem solving courts, and women's centres and is showing reductions in women's arrests, prosecutions, and imprisonment (Ministry of Justice, 2018). However, the evaluations reveal that mental health services that could provide specific therapeutic intervention are not as embedded in the project as needed (Kinsella et al., 2018). This research shows that supporting women during this phase of recovery involves facilitating access to structured therapeutic interventions appropriate to the woman's needs.

## 9.4. Reconnection

Almost without exception, the transition from prison to the community was experienced as traumatic for those involved in the follow-up sessions. The women described it as having triggered symptoms of anxiety and depression (Lynne, Catherine, Jane, Zoe), relapse into drug/alcohol use and prostitution/sex work (Janine, Lynne, Miriam, Amy, Rina), involvement in harmful or unhealthy relationships (Lynne, Carla). Only Frankie and Michaela had enjoyed a comparatively uncomplicated reintegration into the community.

Chapter six explains the importance of connections with individuals, groups, and communities to successful desistance. The final stage of the trauma recovery process focuses on reconnection. This involves restoring a sense of self, developing and deepening relationships, and increasing agentic participation in ordinary life (Herman 1992/2015; Courtois and Ford, 2016). Having reconciled with her traumatic past, at this stage of recovery, a survivor can start to assess her potential and constraints in order to make realistic life choices that may not have been possible previously owing to the impact of her trauma symptoms (Courtois and Ford, 2016). Furthermore, this stage focuses on deepening her connections with those she has learned to trust (Herman, 1992/2015). This thesis has explored some of the challenges the women encountered in different areas of their lives related to the desistance process. These challenges are formidable, but not insurmountable.

The reflections of some of those in the follow-up groups sheds some light on how this stage of recovery is experienced by women trying to leave crime behind after prison.

By the final stage of trauma recovery, the survivor has an understanding of her posttraumatic symptoms. She recognises that she has been a victim and understands the effects of her victimisation, but is no longer stuck in *victimhood* (Herman 1992/2015). Lynne talks about this as 'learning to accept things.' Having worked through her traumatic experiences, Lynne can understand criminogenic behaviours that began as coping mechanisms.

You know, acceptance is I've found one of the biggest things ever, you know, and I learnt that really in there [prison] as well... you've got to accept things, because if you don't accept things you can't move on, you know. And I knew that, but I didn't really grasp it until you really look into things, like, what I did, I could move on, because I was always stuck in the past, always stuck in the past, that's what kept me in my drinking (Lynne, FU1).

As implied by Lynne, the reconnection stage of recovery also denotes a readiness to take concrete steps to 'move on.' For women in this study, that involved reducing their vulnerability, increasing their sense of power and control, and developing mechanisms of self-protection. Though they were at different stages of this process, the women in the follow-up groups who were desisting were actively taking steps to reduce their vulnerability and increase their autonomy. At our first follow-up session, Lynne had been participating in MBT therapy groups which she had found empowering and helped her cope with anxieties about other areas of her life.

With group work, I think what it is as well, you've got one another because you've been through the same sort of thing. And it's support, isn't it? You know what I mean? You can support each other. Yeah, I like group work as well. I do like group work (Lynne, FU1).

Catherine ended a relationship that was causing anxiety and frustration and that she perceived as preventing her from realising her potential. Miriam had reduced her drug use and was engaged with support providers. Zoe was pro-active in ensuring she received support, particularly around housing and employment, which could help her sustain progress. Michaela returned to college and cut ties with her ex-partner, and Frankie was

thriving in her new job. It is of note that not all these women had experienced trauma<sup>36</sup> but their interviews revealed all had worked on emotionally processing the experiences that had contributed to their imprisonment. For Lynne and Miriam, this had been a process that had taken decades. For others such as Catherine and Michaela, it was a much quicker process.

As a result of having established a level of safety and the emotional processing of their experiences, these women were able to start to try out aspects of a new identity.

I was on the bus the other day, someone got on a bus, I could have took his wallet, it was just hanging there, sitting there for me to, I could have took it. I went up to the man and I tapped him on his shoulder and excuse me, I said listen to me, I said I'm a pickpocket, I'm telling you put your wallet away before you don't have a wallet and he looked at me and goes thank you so much love, thank you and he took the wallet out and he put it in his inside pocket... I felt good, I did and he just laughed with me and I laughed with him, you know what I mean, and this was like some posh person, from Highbury and Islington but I felt good (Miriam, FU1).

Catherine had experienced significant emotional challenges resettling back into her family environment and re-negotiating relationships with her partner and children. Once her partner left, she reflected on how small actions were enabling her to take back control.

He's still got stuff in the loft. Because it used to grate on me, as well, when he'd come and take the stuff, I had no control of him moving out then. Like, he'd come in, and he'd, like, take stuff when I weren't here, and that, when I was at work, and he was with the kids. And he'd, like, pack a bag, and take stuff with him, and I hated it. So then, I started packing his stuff up for him, and then it gave me the control back (Catherine, FU2).

By contrast, those who had been returned to custody had been unable to work on emotionally processing their experiences. The physical, emotional, and psychological safety necessary for recovery had not been established. For these women, the emotional processing stage was incomplete and they remained vulnerable to criminogenic trauma symptoms. Janine remained homeless and stuck in patterns of drug use, prostitution/sex work, and offending until she was recalled. Amy, Dawn, and Carla all experienced drug and/or mental health issues for which support had been inadequate and therefore persisted on release. Rina's brother was tragically killed a few weeks after her release, triggering a relapse into drug use. Though Miriam, Michaela, and Lynne had experiences of lapses in drug and alcohol use, they were able to keep these contained, whereas Rina was not.

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<sup>36</sup> Frankie did not report any experiences of trauma.

He was stabbed on [date], yeah, so he was stabbed and killed so things went a bit hectic from then really and I'm back in (Rina, FU1).

In-keeping with the gender-responsive principle of recognising experiences as gendered, an additional task for this stage of recovery is to help women see their traumatic experiences are part of a much larger picture of the traumatic exploitation of women (Bloom, 1997/2013). Bloom (1997/2013) argues that it is not possible to address child abuse, domestic violence, and all forms of interpersonal violence without understanding the social and political context within which such violence is maintained, supported, and encouraged. At this stage, the survivor can meaningfully question their role as they are able to distinguish between destructive self-blame and affirming self-evaluation. In our second follow-up session, Lynne spoke about her daughter going into the care of her brothers. This caused her to reflect on the events in her life that had culminated in the loss of her child.

I knew that I couldn't handle looking after [my daughter] because I couldn't look after myself. She ended up looking after me, she was only seven. That's when my brothers got her... the first drink I had was from the age of seven when my dad used to bring it home. So I've drunk nearly all my life to be honest... But it was only towards the end, when I lost [my daughter], that I became really, really bad through drinking. But after that, I lost my partner, then I lost my flat, everything tumbled down. Spiralled out of control... But I know why I drank. My dad was such a bully. Oh god, he was such a bully. He was terrible. He was a violent alcoholic. My brother had to go away because dad used to beat us up, and my mum and that terrible... Lots of things, bad things. But you know, the funny thing is people called me a survivor. But I don't like that word...I don't like the word survivor. We got through it all, yeah, I'm here now, but I don't know, I just don't know... But I know what I want, I want all my family to be back together. I do. That's one thing I want (Lynne, FU2).

A noted outcome of trauma-informed intervention is how it enables women to talk about trauma with their families (Petrillo et al., 2019). The strategies women acquire in learning to heal themselves can be applied to their families, their friends, and the larger social systems within which they live. Lynne recognised the impact talking about her own recovery was having on her family.

....everything I tried to do never worked out, things sort of went bad, no matter how much I tried, everything just never worked out and I think, in the end, it just got to me. Then when I found out about [my daughter] being abused and that, that just, that really, really put the icing on the cake really that did, and that was a lot of guilt, because I weren't there to protect her, the same as my mum must have felt when I got abused. I suppose now I look at things differently, because a lot of things I've worked through, there's still a lot of things I have to work through...It's disgraceful me going away to

prison, but you know, even when I was in there, they were saying, mum, you're doing well, you should be proud of yourself, this, that and the other and I suppose it's because I've never been told that really, but now I do feel proud of myself and I can say that, you know, which is a good feeling (Lynne, FU1)

As Lynne, Catherine, Jane and others who reached this stage of recovery demonstrated, ultimately, by this stage, the survivor understands that the harm they suffered and caused is reparable, they are able to let go of shame, and aspects of the self that are responses to trauma. As Herman (1992/2015: 204) states, *'Compassion and respect for the traumatized, victim self join with a celebration of the survivor self'*, as exemplified here by Jane,

Because the person isn't the crime, I get that now. I didn't for ages, but I get it now. The person committed the crime, but that person isn't that crime; there's a difference (Jane, FU1).

As this stage is also about engaging more actively with the world, work should focus on deepening connections in relationships that have been sustained, including professional relationships.

I'm working for a trust called Heart Trust right now, and they help people that's come out of prison get back into work, build back up your self-esteem. I realised that after coming out my self-esteem has kind of been shattered...And one thing about the Heart Trust, a lot of the people that work there are ex-offenders that's managed to get places with them. So now I think that's what keeps me going. In the beginning I just thought... like I was depressed and I started sliding back into my old ways of drinking and stuff. But I think ever since I've started back at uni...because now I've got a routine and I belong somewhere again, it's easier now (Michaela, FU1).

According to trauma recovery models, at the reconnection phase, the therapeutic alliance feels less intense, more relaxed and secure. Crises and disruptions are infrequent. This was noted by those who had a good working alliance with their Probation Officers.

I look forward to going there, because I think it's...my probationer officer is nice, she understands me, we chat about anything and everything, if I've got problems she helps me, you know what I mean, she does. So it's support, it's support and I think that's what you need (Lynne, FU1).

Like my probation officer, I've had texts saying they're happy for me that I got my flat, just keep myself out of trouble now and sort my life out and stay on top like. I was chuffed when I got messages like that from her. You know what I mean, it gives you that incentive to like keep it up sort of thing (Miriam, FU2)

As explained in chapter six, for women in this research, ending intimate relationships could be symbolic of progress towards personal change that might support desistance. However, deepening relationships with other family members and children remained an important focus in this stage of recovery. In our final session, Lynne recounted how she had supported her daughter through her miscarriage,

I had a bit of bad news, because my eldest daughter, she didn't think she could get pregnant, anyway she got pregnant and she had twins and she lost them. So, that's a really bad time and I would have thought...because that's the time I would normally drink, I drink with things like that, but, no, she needs help and I supported her, you know what I mean, so that's a really big step for me, really (Lynne, FU2).

The progress Lynne made during and after her sentence is epitomised in her response to this event. Her relationships with her children had previously been evidence of all the ways she perceived herself to have failed. By the end of the research, they were evidence of her success.

Supporting women in the reconnection phase focuses on helping her trust her own ability to further her growth and respond appropriately to any re-emergence of trauma symptoms. Professional support should start to be replaced by peer-led and personal support networks that have been developing over the preceding phases of recovery. At this stage, the survivor is able to identify and respond to the re-emergence of trauma symptoms by activating safety plans and support networks, thereby avoiding a return to criminogenic behaviour.

## 9.6. Conclusion

This chapter examines the women's insights into the type of support they identify as useful to them sustaining desistance on release from custody. It applies a framework of trauma recovery to demonstrate how this corresponds with models of desistance and gender-responsive practice. To facilitate explanation, the trauma recovery model separates and applies a clear sequence to processes that are, in fact highly, interconnected, and through which progress is likely to ebb and flow. The question of *how* criminal justice practitioners can support women to develop positive relationships, a robust sense of self, and appropriate responsibility and autonomy so necessary for desistance has largely gone unanswered. This

research suggests that applying a trauma model of recovery to practice with women in prison and under community supervision corresponds with women's understanding of the nature of the support they perceive as most important to helping them sustain desistance.

### **Principles for practice: Supporting recovery to sustain desistance**

This study's analysis of experiences of recovery from a trauma perspective concludes that desistance may be supported in several ways, many of which are advocated in by gender-responsive, trauma-informed approaches to practice research. The first principle should be to strive to divert women away from the criminal justice system. Where this is not possible, treatment and intervention must:

- be delivered in a safe environment, this would generally mean a women-only space within the women's communities where possible, with a range of support services available (Bloom, 2013; Covington and Bloom, 1998).
- be staffed by properly trained and supervised professionals and survivors, working on the basis of collaboration and co-production (Bloom, 2013; Harris and Fallot, 2001)
- proceed at a pace at which the survivor is comfortable (Covington and Russo, 2016).
- be voluntary or, where this is impossible, participation should be positively encouraged, not punitively enforced.
- make use of appropriate structured, therapeutic interventions (Covington and Bloom, 1998)
- encourage group based interventions and peer-support (Herman , 1992/2015)

## 10. Women's desistance from crime: a gender-responsive, trauma-informed analysis

This thesis analyses women's experiences of the desistance process, revealing factors that are supportive of, or obstacles to, their efforts to leave crime behind after prison. It also examines the extent to which women's experiences of the processes associated with desistance are gendered. In response to this analysis, it proposes a gender-responsive, trauma-informed framework for practice, based on the women's knowledge of their recovery needs, and through which criminal justice practitioners can support women's efforts to sustain desistance.

In so doing, the research makes original contributions to the literature on women's desistance. It places an emphasis on listening to the women's experiences in creating knowledge about desistance processes. It applies feminist and trauma theories to women's experiences to interrogate processes of managing relationships, restoring identity, exercising personal responsibility, and processes of recovery from a gendered perspective.

Furthermore, it uses this analysis to detail *how* a trauma recovery model, underpinned by principles of gender-responsivity, can provide a framework for practice to support women's desistance. Proposals for practice based on desistance theories have focused on process rather than content, taking lessons from the effective practice era about the unintended consequences of overly prescriptive interventions (Weaver and McNeill, 2010). However, this analysis concludes that supporting women's desistance requires a different perspective, directed by questions that are the basis for gender-responsive, trauma-informed practice. These questions are not '*what did she do?*' and '*what works?*' but rather '*what happened to her?*' and '*what is the work?*' (Covington and Bloom, 1999).

The literature on desistance-focused practice acknowledges the importance of critical perspectives on practice with marginalised groups.



*'Creative practice needs to be about more than navigating the way over, under, around or through obstacles – sometimes it needs to be about confronting and removing them...To focus solely on overcoming these obstacles at the individual level runs the risk of accepting the world as it is, thus colluding with the social structures and attitudes that diminish the resources for desistance available to marginalised groups. It is here that for practice to be truly creative it must be destructive'* (Weaver and McNeill, 2010: 56)

This concluding chapter draws together findings from the data chapters to respond to the original research questions. Following this, it examines some implications of this research to desistance theory, in particular the discourse on women's desistance. Next, it makes proposals for further research. It concludes with some reflections on HMP Holloway and the provision of support for women in the justice system.

## 10.1. Summary of key findings

To begin, this chapter will summarise the key findings from this study in response to the research questions.

### 10.1.1. What factors do women leaving prison experience as either supporting or presenting obstacles to their efforts to desist from crime?

This research represents one of the few, UK-based, qualitative studies into women's experiences of desistance, that examines the journey from prison to the community. The original fifty-six women in the research cohort had a broad range of desistance experiences to draw on. These ranged from never having had a significant break in offending, to repeated short phases of sustaining desistance, to periods of up to ten years without offending. Elicited through the research methodology of repeated, in-depth interviewing, the women's insights contribute important, personal knowledge on the factors and processes that support or hinder women's desistance. This knowledge has historically been overlooked in desistance theorising, though since the commencement of this research, there has been a growing body of inspiring research into that gives voice to women's experiences

of desistance, much of which has been drawn on in this analysis (for example, Goodwin, 2016; Leverentz, 2014; McCorkel, 2013; Österman, 2018; Sheehan and Trotter, 2018).

On a superficial level, the women's testimonies in this and other studies itemise a predictable list of what is required to desist; somewhere to live, a job, drug treatment, mental health treatment, and better relationships. In summary, conventionalising factors that will move the women from a marginalised to an integrated social existence. However, this research shows that processes involved in laying these foundations for desistance are gendered and significantly influenced by the personal, social, and relational contexts in which the women are trying to sustain change.

In response to the question, this research identified four domains to be significant to women's desistance; managing relationships, restoring a sense of self, exercising appropriate responsibility and autonomy, and processes of recovery. The research shows that these processes can both reinforce *and* hinder efforts to desist, leading the analysis to focus on how to use them to support desistance. Analysis of all four themes revealed the following to be important:

### **Opportunities to emotionally process trauma and victimisation**

This thesis concludes that within all four domains, women perceive the opportunity to emotionally process the impacts of prolonged trauma as significant to supporting their efforts to desist. With reference to relationships (chapter 6), the analysis concludes that managing intimate, familial, and peer relationships in addition to relationships with children, requires intervention to address the physical, emotional, and psychological harm caused by previous relationships. Within the theme of restoration (chapter 7), the analysis concluded that working through the identity annihilation that is the result of prolonged domestic and/or childhood abuse, and letting go shame and stigma are crucial processes in restoring an identity. This involves work to enhance self-esteem and self-confidence, and to build an identity disentangled from those imposed by the abuser(s), including the justice system. The theme of responsibility (chapter 8) highlights the importance of providing opportunities for women to learn about the scope and boundaries of personal responsibility and agency in

contexts that, through social constructions of gender, have historically limited women's full participation in social life. The women's accounts of helpful support emphasised the need for structured, therapeutic intervention that helps them understand their experiences of trauma and their associations with crime-related behaviours.

### **Opportunities for connection**

Within all four themes examined in this thesis, it is concluded that opportunities for connection are significant to women's efforts to move away from crime. The analysis of the women's experiences of relationships evidenced the ways in which prolonged trauma diminishes their capacity to form relationships of the type that have been shown to support desistance. The importance of recognising and nurturing safe, growth-supporting relationships, and managing harmful ones, were dominant features of the women's desistance narratives. It was concluded that relationships are also important to restoring a sense of self. The women's testimonies revealed the challenges of attempting to positively re-biograph life stories that include experiences of relational trauma. This chapter revealed the extent of women's feelings of isolation and the challenges this poses to sustaining personal change. It concluded that, as identity is damaged in the context of relationships, a relational context is essential to healing and restoration. The theme of responsibility concluded that the concept of relational autonomy is a useful framework for understanding and developing agency to support women's desistance. Relational autonomy accounts for the multifaceted nature of identity and intersecting experiences of oppression that limit opportunities for autonomy. In doing so, it makes space for a collective form of agency and encompasses relational values of love, loyalty, commitment, and care within constructions of agency. Within the theme of recovery, it was concluded that developing opportunities for relationships based on mutuality with practitioners, family, and peers can provide opportunities for education and validation, and are an important element of support at all stages of the recovery process.

### **Opportunities for conventionalising experiences**

This thesis concludes that conventionalising experiences are perceived as important to women's efforts to sustain desistance. The women desired traditional, conventional

relationships with intimate partners and children that could provide access to roles affirming their belonging within conventional society. The theme of restoration revealed the extent of the women's isolation and their sense of being 'abnormal.' This research concludes that restoring a sense self and reducing shame and isolation means helping women see how widespread their experiences are through connections with other women. This involves the creation of safe social spaces in which women's experiences and responses are normalised and where they are able to be seen as 'normal,' even if these are within traditionally stigmatising institutions, including prisons and probation. Tied up with the women's assertions of responsibility and agency were stories of a lack of control, self-blame, and learned helplessness that reinforced feelings of marginalisation. The women in this research identified possibilities for conventionalising experiences within this domain to involve opportunities to exercise power and choice in personal and social spheres of their life.

### **Opportunities for recovery**

There is growing research in relation to trauma-informed interventions. What remains to be seen is how this is best applied in correctional settings (Sheehan and Trotter, 2018). The theme of recovery centralises the women's testimonies about the importance of being supported to work through their past experiences through therapeutic interventions, so that they understand the impact of their past experiences on their present behaviour. In summary, this research suggests that opportunities to emotionally process experiences of trauma and victimisation are an essential component of practice frameworks to support women's desistance. It concludes that intensive support structures, focused on trauma, are essential to emotionally process feelings of self-blame, to encourage compassionate self-evaluation of their personal responsibility, and to develop capacities for agentic participation in society. Opportunities for conventionalising experiences were identified as significant to the women's processes of recovery. These were accessed through safe spaces where the women could try out new behaviours, therapeutic relationships that bear witness to and validate their experiences, and therapeutic interventions that enable them to reconnect with ordinary life.

### 10.1.2 To what extent are women's experiences of the desistance process gendered? Implications for desistance theory.

In addition to the above research question, this study sought to analyse the extent to which are women's experiences of the desistance process are gendered. This analysis has implications for desistance theory more generally, specifically in relation to sex/gender role expectations, the prevalence of complex trauma, desistance as an embodied process, and the impacts of intersectional social marginalisation.

Studies that examine the impact of sex/gender role expectations on men's desistance illustrate that desistance depends on the extent new behaviours can be constructed as compatible with notions of masculinity formerly accomplished through offending behaviour (Carlsson, 2013; Gadd, 2006, Gadd and Farrall, 2004, Hamilton, 2016). Offending is not at odds with constructions of masculinity. 'Boys will be boys' belies a social imperative to accept 'bad behaviour' as integral to male sex/gender role expectations. Therefore, conformity to these expectations for men trying to sustain desistance means reorienting the performance of masculinity within pro-social discourses of work, the family, and conventional social spheres. Conversely, offending and related behaviours are incompatible with women's sex/gender role expectations (Kennedy, 1992; Lloyd, 1995). Instead, these leave women shamed and stigmatised, inhibiting their ability to perform femininity in a way that corresponds with dominant sex/gender role expectations. Additionally, a patriarchal context ultimately liberates and empowers men while limiting and subordinating women (Evans, 2018). This constitutes femininity as submissive, dependent on '*stripping [women] of their agency, of their voices, and of the right to fight back against harms committed against them*' (Evans, 2018: 87). Consequently, unlike men, conformity to sex/gender role expectations is not necessarily empowering or emancipatory for women. This means alternative domains through which women can accomplish femininity are more limited, particularly for women who have survived marginalising experiences that have resulted in involvement in the criminal justice system. These women are often excluded from work, the family, and conventional social spheres as a consequence of having transgressed sex/gender role expectations. As has been shown in this research, women's experiences of the family, the availability and types of roles through which they can define themselves, and their ability to

exercise autonomy and appropriate personal responsibility are all influenced by sex/gender role expectations that restrict their opportunities for growth and healing.

Many men in the criminal justice system report experiences of trauma, however the prevalence and repeated nature of the abuse experienced by women in this research reveals this to be a gendered aspect of the desistance process. For most women in this study, victimisation by those closest to them started in childhood and persisted into their adult relationships. It is the repeated exposure to relational abuse that differentiates women's experiences from those of men. The prevalence of experiences of trauma and victimisation in the narratives of the women in this study were such that it would have been impossible to propose any gendered understanding of women's desistance that did not include analysis of trauma. The significance of trauma symptoms on processes related to desistance have not been included in general desistance theorising. Complex trauma plays a key role in the women's access to positive relationships. It also impacts on identities that can be employed to support desistance, such as motherhood. It has a destructive or corrosive impact on women's sense of self, and presents an obstacle to the exercise of agency. This thesis concludes that overcoming experiences of childhood and domestic abuse is a necessary component of practice to support women's desistance, and that trauma may be an important area of research in future studies on men's desistance.

Desistance theories present desistance primarily as the interaction between cognitive processes and the development of social capital (Giordano et al., 2002; LeBel et al. 2008; Maruna, 2001). Examination of the emotional aspects of desistance is rare, but is increasingly informing desistance theories (Vaughan, 2007; Farrall et al., 2014). This thesis shows the extent to which moving away from crime for women is also an embodied process. Recovery and desistance are presented as relying initially on finding physical safety so they can work on factors that are contributing to their offending. Among the women in this research, emotions are felt and expressed physically, through expressions of rage turned outwards towards others, or turned inwards through self-harm. The significance of being female bodied to their understandings of their identities is threaded through their narratives pertaining to their relationships, their sense of self, their autonomy, and how they envisage their recovered selves.

Much of the desistance research acknowledges the role of structural and cultural context and differentiated disadvantage on offending and desistance (Sampson and Laub, 2003), yet proceed to disregard this in declarations of the generalisability of the theories across people's different socially situated identities (Potter, 2015). When race and gender variations in desistance patterns have been identified (for example, Giordano et al. 2002), these have not been examined beyond a frequency level analysis (Potter, 2015).<sup>37</sup> This research highlights how desistance processes of forming relationships, restoring identity, exercising personal responsibility, and processes of recovery are all impacted by women's marginalised social, political, and economic circumstances, all of which are aggravated by race, multiplied by class, multiplied by legal status, multiplied by sexuality, multiplied by ability, and other markers of difference. Intersectional oppression results in cumulative disadvantage that constrains access to desistance supporting processes.

### 10.1.3. How can prisons and other agencies in the justice system best support women's efforts to desist from crime?

In response to this question, this thesis proposes a framework for practice supporting women's desistance that is based on a trauma model of recovery and is underpinned by principles of gender-responsivity (see chapter 3). These share principles for practice that are advocated in the desistance literature. The proposed framework is intended to embrace desistance-focused approaches (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; Weaver and McNeill, 2010; McNeill, 2006) and, in addition, respond to women's experiences of trauma and abuse and the patriarchal socio-political context that shapes these experiences.

The proposed framework for practice is adapted from general trauma recovery models in order that it could be implemented by prison and probation services to support women's desistance. Although research repeatedly finds community-based interventions to be most effective, this research has shown that prison is often the first time women have the time, space, and stability to examine their past experiences (see chapter nine). The women in this research also identified release as a particularly challenging time. The proposed framework

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<sup>37</sup> This critique applies to this study, see chapter six.

provides a means of bridging the gap between the desistance-supporting work undertaken in prison and support in the community following release. The proposed model is one that either allows for work to begin and develop in prison and transition to the community, or to be delivered wholly in the community. The arguments that feminists in criminology should be working towards decarceration and the diversion of women from the justice system are convincing. However, for the foreseeable future, there will be a population of women in prison and subject to probation who have an urgent need for rehabilitative approaches that respond to their experiences of trauma (Player, 2016). The provision of such resources within the justice system is not necessarily in conflict with more transformational endeavours, as they could strengthen the evidence of the effectiveness of trauma-informed, gender-responsive approaches to women's offending.

### **A gender-responsive, trauma-informed practice framework to support women's desistance**

Drawing together findings from the data chapters on practice that could address women's trauma-related needs that are also factors in their offending, figure 9.1 (below) provides a model for gender-responsive, trauma-informed practice with women in the justice system, detailing specific therapeutic input at key stages of recovery. The model details how to support the women in managing relationships, restoring identity, and exercising personal responsibility. Based on trauma recovery's three stage model (Herman, 1992/2015), it is a framework specifically designed to identify the nature of the work required, how it can be achieved and by whom, and the intended outcome at each stage of the process. The 'tasks' refer to appropriate work the woman can undertake at each stage. The framework is underpinned by principles of gender-responsivity (Covington and Bloom, 2007; Gelsthorpe et al., 2007) and trauma-informed practice; safety, trust, collaboration, choice, and empowerment (Harris and Fallot, 2001) and a commitment to tackling the soci-political context that subordinate women.





**Figure 9.3: A gender-responsive, trauma-informed framework for women's desistance (adapted from Herman, 1992/2015)**

		<b>Phase 1: Establishing Safety</b>	<b>Phase 2: Emotional Processing</b>	<b>Phase 3: Reconnection</b>
<b>Managing relationships</b>	Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing important personal and professional relationships as a source of protection, emotional support, and practical help.</li> <li>• Reviewing relationships for potential sources of harm.</li> <li>• Establishing safe living conditions, or access to a safe space.</li> <li>• Undertaking safety planning, including the mobilisation of a support network.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-constructing the 'trauma story.' Reassembling an organised, detailed account, including her responses and the responses of those close to her.</li> <li>• Reducing vulnerability in relationships.</li> <li>• Learning about what is typical in the intimate relationships, particularly issues of consent.</li> <li>• Developing the capacity to feel compassion for others and herself.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deepening alliances with those she has learnt to trust. Developing relationships with friends, intimate partners, family, and professionals based on mutuality.</li> <li>• Severing relationships that are harmful</li> <li>• Recognising the ways in which the trauma has affected children. Considering how best to share her experiences with them and how to draw lessons from the experiences that will promote healthy connections to children.</li> </ul>
	Role of criminal justice professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocating for housing support.</li> <li>• Facilitating access to services for survivors of childhood &amp;/or domestic abuse.</li> <li>• Identify safe, women-only spaces, such as women's centres</li> <li>• Crisis planning</li> <li>• Establishing the service user/practitioner alliance as a safe relationship.</li> <li>• Advising on accessing legal support if/when required.</li> <li>• Begin identifying opportunities to reduce loneliness and isolation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing access to specialised therapeutic interventions such as MBT, DBT, psychotherapy, and trauma-informed programmes.</li> <li>• Being a witness and ally by creating a safe environment in which the woman can explore her experiences and by providing validation</li> <li>• Put practical help in place, such as childcare and travel expenses to help the woman maintain involvement in any interventions/programmes.</li> <li>• Preserving safety by revisiting the tasks in phase 1.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a system for continuing support outside the CJS through, for example, professional, culturally-relevant services, access to peer-support groups, and mentoring opportunities.</li> <li>• Support engagement with opportunities for social interaction including work, leisure activities, family relationships.</li> <li>• Provide 'secure base' from which the woman can try out opportunities to build relationships with individuals and the communities to which she belongs.</li> </ul>
	Intended Outcomes:	The women lives away from her abusers, has access to a 'safe space', &/or has a detailed safety plan in place for times of crisis.	The woman feels ready to develop new relationships or deepen those that have supported her recovery. She is learning to be appropriately trusting and self-protective in relationships. Has a reasonably secure alliance with practitioners.	The woman feels safe and in control of her relationships and no longer feels compelled to participate in harmful relationships. She is increasingly socially integrated.

<b>Restoring identity</b>	Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing sobriety</li> <li>Learning about the impact of victimisation on identity formation</li> <li>Developing routines of self-care that tend to basic health needs</li> <li>Developing self-soothing and relaxation techniques</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retelling the trauma story with attention to imagery, bodily sensations, and emotions</li> <li>Transforming the traumatic memories so they can be safely integrated into a self-narrative</li> <li>Reclaiming the ability to feel a full range of emotions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rejecting the burden of shame, stigma, and guilt.</li> <li>Shedding the victim identity and other aspects of the self imposed by the trauma.</li> <li>Recognising positive aspects of the self forged in the traumatic experiences, such as resilience.</li> <li>Recovering or discovering personal aspirations and ambitions.</li> </ul>
	Role of professionals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating access to drug/alcohol treatment service.</li> <li>Facilitating access to healthcare</li> <li>Education about the impact of trauma and abuse on identity.</li> <li>Supporting the development of self-care routines</li> <li>Sharing self-soothing and relaxation techniques</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normalising the responses to trauma, supporting the naming of abuse and emotional responses.</li> <li>Helping to construct a new interpretation of experiences that affirms the resilience, dignity, and value of the survivor.</li> <li>Providing access to therapeutic interventions such as MBT, DBT, psychotherapy, trauma-informed programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating access to peer-led support such as mentoring or self-help groups.</li> <li>Maintaining the relationship as a secure base from which the survivor can identify and 'try out' new roles and behaviours.</li> </ul>
	Outcomes:	The woman is working towards stabilising addiction or mental health problems. She has established basic self-care routines and terminated or reduced traumagenic coping mechanisms.	<p>The traumatic memories are no longer intrusive and are within the control of the survivor.</p> <p>She understands the impact of trauma on her sense of self and is discovering an identity that is not governed by her trauma story/stories.</p>	<p>The woman is in the process of creating a new identity. She is starting to develop desires and ambitions that belong to her.</p> <p>Has a greater capacity for reflexivity and is able to use this at times of inner conflict.</p>

<b>Exercising appropriate responsibility</b>	Tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising and naming abuse and recording symptoms.</li> <li>• Defining boundaries of, and potential, for personal responsibility</li> <li>• Learning coping mechanisms that do not increase vulnerability and trauma.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Unfreezing' the trauma stories so that the survivor has control of how they are integrated into her narrative.</li> <li>• Systematically reviewing the meaning of the traumatic events so examining moral questions of guilt and responsibility</li> <li>• Acknowledging and grieving for the loss of moral integrity and finding a way to forgive herself, thereby reaffirming the claim to a moral choice in the present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing her own agenda for her life</li> <li>• Taking concrete steps to increase her sense of power and control</li> <li>• Self-examination of mistakes (only in an environment that protects against shaming).</li> </ul>
	Role of criminal justice professionals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepting the survivor's account without seeking certainty.</li> <li>• Education about the impact of trauma on autonomy.</li> <li>• Education about the boundaries of blame and responsibility, with attention to the influence of patriarchy.</li> <li>• Sharing safe, alternative coping strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirming a position of moral solidarity with the survivor as a means of validating her responses.</li> <li>• Providing access to therapeutic interventions such as MBT, DBT, psychotherapy, trauma-informed programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating access to peer-led support.</li> <li>• Facilitating access to culturally-relevant support services to help develop understanding of the broader social context of violence against women.</li> <li>• Provide practical help with planning for her future.</li> <li>• Support and facilitate any action the survivor wants to take in responding to the abuse, including legal action.</li> </ul>
	Outcomes:	The woman is beginning to exercise capacities to initiate action. She is becoming aware of the limits of her responsibility.	The woman is constructing a system of beliefs that understands her abuse as undeserved. She is making her own decisions about how to address the abuse. She is experiencing enhanced feelings of competence, self-esteem, and freedom.	The woman has a deeper recognition of powerlessness in traumatic experiences, therefore a greater appreciation of her coping resources. She acknowledged the damage done and understands that it is reparable. She has stopped blaming herself, whilst taking responsibility for her future. She can feel autonomous within her relationships.

## 10.4. Recommendations for further research

This research has shown that concepts of relationships, identity, and agency, that are significant to the desistance process, are not monolithic concepts. Gendered, trauma-informed perspectives on these problematize some of the ways they are presented in general desistance theories. I note in chapter five that this analysis omits an examination of how intersectional marginalisation specifically impacts on these concepts. An analysis of intersectional experiences of desistance would further develop the ideas presented here and add further depth to understandings of women's experiences of the desistance process.

Trauma-informed approaches for women (and men) in the justice system are increasingly advocated as a promising new direction for policy and practice (Ministry of Justice, 2018a). Whilst there is evidence of the efficacy of trauma-informed interventions in improving symptoms of trauma related to offending (Messina et al., 2014, Messina and Calhoun, 2018; Petrillo et al., 2019), there has been no research on how trauma-informed approaches specifically impact on desistance. This could be an important focus for future research on the value of gender-responsive, trauma-informed practice to support desistance.

## 10.5. Echoes of Holloway

In June 2016, the gates of Holloway prison clanked shut for the final time. In 1902, the then '*grim Victorian fortress*' (Rock 1996: 9) had become the first women-only prison in England. By the time of its closure, it was the largest women's prison in Western Europe.

In many ways, the story of HMP Holloway stands as a metaphor for society's understandings of and responses to women who commit crime. Historically, women who commit crime have been depicted as 'mad' and in need of treatment, or 'bad' and in need of control (Heidensohn, 1996). Policy and practice responses to criminalised women have fluctuated in a reflection of this reductive dichotomy.

Rock described the original Holloway as conjuring up '*fairytale imagery of castles and dungeons, of barons, kings and giants*' (1996: 17), a strikingly gendered appreciation of the prison's architecture that also implies its occupants were wayward storybook princesses in need of taming or rescuing.

Throughout its history, HMP Holloway found new, and at times barbaric, methods of taming unruly women, from the force-feeding of suffragettes at the turn of the twentieth century to the excessive use of anti-psychotic medication during the 1960s (Rock, 1996), and the gallows that saw the hangings of seven women between 1903 and 1955 (Davies, 2018). It is widely accepted that women who commit crime were perceived, and perhaps still are, as '*doubly deviant*' (Lloyd, 1995). Their behaviour conflicts with both society's law and accepted norms of femininity. Punishment in the form of bodily violence or medicalisation reflects prison regimes organised to '*feminise, domesticize, medicalise and infantilise*' women (Carlen, Hicks, O'Dwyer and Tchaikovsky, 1985: 183-4) continued until the prison's closure. A few months after the completion of the fieldwork for this research, Sarah Reed tragically committed suicide in Holloway. The shameful circumstances of her death include physical violence from prison staff, inappropriate and insufficient mental health treatment, and a cruel disregard for Sarah's distress that reflect the continued forceful repression of women who cannot, or will not, respond according to recognised norms of behaviour.<sup>38</sup>

Yet unruly women have also made use of Holloway as a symbol of women's resistance. The prison has been used by women in purposeful protest against various forms of oppression. The Suffragettes were followed by the women from the Greenham Common Peace Camp and, more recently, Sisters Uncut, the most famous among a range of other groups challenging Holloway as an emblem and enforcer of women's oppression. Prison memoirs and testimonies from former inmates have also been used to symbolically resist reductive depictions of women prisoners, by rendering them more three-dimensional and giving lie to the notion that women's offending can be reduced to gendered pathology (for example; Carlen et al., 1985; Wyner 2003; Davies 2018).

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<sup>38</sup> See <https://www.inquest.org.uk/sarah-reed-inquest-conclusions> for further information on Sarah Reed's case.

Holloway as suppressor of rebellious women has consistently been juxtaposed with Holloway as rescuer of vulnerable women. The Holloway redevelopment project during the 1970s and 1980s aimed to transform the prison in line with therapeutic community models;

*'where there had been constraint and surveillance, there would be freedom; where there had been great intimidating spaces, there would be small, intimate areas; the high, forbidding boundary of the total institution was to become a mundane and reassuring perimeter; what had been separate would become integrated; and where there had been punishment, there would be healing. In short, the terrifying symbolism of the old was to be replaced by the comfortable ordinariness of the new'* (Rock 1996: 143).

During the course of the rebuilding of Holloway, the rhetoric on women who break the law shifted. By the late 1980s, moral panics flared up around an 'underclass' of fatherless youths exploiting permissive mothers and a supportive welfare state who were choosing crime and delinquency over work (Carlen and Worrall, 2004). Implicit in the theory is that all crime is explicable in terms of family structure and parenting that harked back to ideas, prevalent since biblical times, of women as the root of all crime (Kennedy, 1992). The bars went back on the windows of the 'new' Holloway.

The rebuilding of Holloway was completed in 1985 and its muddled design perhaps reflected the confusion about who women offenders are and how they should be treated. Elements of the therapeutically imagined architecture remained; the small, self-contained corridors that looked out onto beautifully manicured gardens, the mixture of individual and dormitory rooms, and the controversial swimming pool. But this was no therapeutic environment, adorned as it was with the trappings of prison; steel cell doors, barred gates, barbed wire fencing, and male officers in riot gear responding to disciplinary infractions. The result was a building that failed as both a prison and as a therapeutic environment (Rock, 1996).

The confused space was reflected in how the justice system was responding to the women within its walls. Feminists in criminology had started to investigate women's offending, exposing the stereotypical constructions of 'women offenders,' analysing associations between women's social position, personal experiences, and offending behaviour (for

example, Carlen, 1988; Heidensohn, 1985/1996; Smart, 1977/2013). As symbolised in Holloway's muddled punitive/therapeutic architecture, during the period between the mid-1980s and the turn of the millennium, the justice system presided over a sharp escalation in custodial sentencing for women that lasted until 2010. Paradoxically, there was simultaneously increasing sensitivity to anti-discriminatory practices that recognised women in the justice system to have different needs and to require different interventions and regimes to their male counterparts (Worrall and Gelsthorpe, 2009). The disappointing result was 'punishments for women;' policies, practices, and programmes tweaked to appear responsive to women's needs, but firmly based on tenets of the 'new penology' (Feeley and Simon, 1992) and 'what works' (Rumgay, 2004a; Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2000).

In the post-Corston (2007), post-Equality Act (2010) era, a proliferation of strategies were published, acknowledging the need for a gender-responsive approach to women's offending. The UK signed up to the Bangkok Rules in 2010, in doing so agreeing to the provision of gender-informed criminal justice policy and practice initiatives (Cain and Clarke, 2015; Evans, 2018). HMIP inspections of HMP Holloway in 2008 and 2010 noted improvements to the regime, provision of services, and interactions between staff and the women. Recognising the complexity of women's needs, in the years prior to its closure, HMP Holloway had become a hub for services providing support to women in the criminal justice system. In 2013-2015, the time the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, outside agencies offered support around drug and alcohol treatment, mentoring, self-harm reduction, exiting prostitution, maintaining contact with children, and education and training. The providers of these services were often in a position to offer continued support once the women were released. The readiness on the part of the prison management to support work that helped prepare women for release is how this research came into being and is perhaps reflected in many of the women's positive reflections on their experience of prison in this research.

The announcement of the closure of HMP Holloway was met with cautious optimism as a sign that government and policy makers had finally heeded Baroness Corston's call to *'replace existing women's prisons with suitable, geographically dispersed, small, multi-functional custodial centres...'* (Corston 2007:35). As the fourth anniversary of the closure approaches, it is clear that caution was warranted. The upheaval experienced by the women



'shipped out' of Holloway caused distress and anxiety (Cain, 2018). Women were relocated all over the country, making visits with family more difficult and having the knock-on effect of causing overcrowding in the receiving establishments (Cain, 2018). The hoped for reductions in the use of imprisonment in favour of community options such as women's centres now look naively idealistic. The closure of Holloway was negated by the re-opening of HMP Downview and the women's prison population has remained stuck at around four thousand, as it has been for the past decade. Twelve years on from the Corston report (2007), prisons remain (or are again) unsafe for women. Twenty-two women died in prisons in England and Wales in 2016, the highest ever number (Inquest, 2018). In a dark synchronicity, and symbolic of what little progress has been made, twelve of these women took their own lives, one less than the number that in 2005 was of such concern that it prompted the commissioning of the Corston Report (2007). However, despite the publication of several reviews and strategy documents, there has been limited implementation of the relatively consistent recommendations for reform (Cain and Clarke, 2015; Evans, 2018).

The closure of HMP Holloway coincided with the implementation of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) (2014). It could be argued that the bulldozing of Holloway is symbolic of the wider destruction of provision for women in the CJS as a result of the ORA 2014. Since its introduction, there has been a sixty-eight percent increase in the number of women recalled to prison and women are more likely than men to have multiple recalls during their post-sentence supervision period (Ministry of Justice, 2015). Women's services in both the Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and the National Probation Service (NPS) have been stripped back. The recent HM Inspectorate of Probation's (2016) thematic review of services in the community for women who offend confirmed that women's centres have been particularly vulnerable, an outcome forewarned by those concerned about provision for women in the justice system (Gelsthorpe and Hedderman, 2012). Many have seen a decline in funding from CRCs and tendering processes that put their continued existence at risk. Women in minority groups are likely to be particularly badly affected by weaknesses in the provision of specialist, gender-specific, culturally appropriate, local services. This leaves practitioners few external resources to draw on to support women's efforts to desist from crime, rendering the need for an understanding of women's desistance and a holistic framework to support practice ever more urgent.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Participant data tables

### Appendix A(i): Definitions of the variables.

Variable name	Label
Participants	Pseudonyms
Returnedtocustody	Returned to custody by 26 May 2016
Age	Age at time of initial interview
Ethnicity	Self-defined ethnicity
Sentence	Sentence length
PreCons	Previous recorded or self-reported offending
Prev.Custody	Has served previous custodial sentences
Children	Is a mother
Alcohol	Current or previous alcohol misuse related to offending
Drugs	Current or previous drug misuse related to offending
MentalHealth	Diagnosed or self-reported mental health problems
Employment	Previous experience of stable employment
PrimaryCarers	Either or both primary carers were physically absent during childhood
ChildhoodAbuse	Experience of childhood abuse (incl. physical, sexual, emotional and neglect)
DomesticAbuse	Experience of domestic abuse (incl. physical, sexual emotional and coercive control)
Trauma	Experience of other trauma not defined as childhood or domestic abuse
Accommodation	Type of accommodation prior to custody
SelfHarm	Current or previous self-harm
Ant.Desistance	Anticipated desistance. Self-reported likelihood of desistance post-release
Prostitution.SexWork	Previous experience of prostitution/sex work
Relationship	Intimate relationship described as being related to the index offence or as a trigger to offending.

Appendix A(ii):

Data on 'return to custody,' participation in follow-up sessions, sentence, and offending histories.

Participants	Returned to custody	FU1	FU2	Sentence	PreCons	Prev. Custody
Abi	Yes	No	No	6-12 mths	Yes	Yes
Alice	Yes	No	No	On remand	Yes	Yes
Amy	Yes	Yes	Yes	3-4 yrs	Yes	Yes
Bette	Yes	No	No	18 mths-2 yrs	Yes	Yes
Carla	Yes	No	Yes	0-3 mths	Yes	Yes
Charlene	Yes	No	No	3-4 yrs	Yes	Yes
Dawn	Yes	No	Yes	0-3 mths	Yes	Yes
Diane	Yes	No	No	2-3 yrs	Yes	No
Emma	Yes	No	No	0-3 mths	Yes	No
Jacki	Yes	No	No	3-4 yrs	Yes	Yes
Janelle	Yes	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	Yes
Janine	Yes	Yes	Yes	2-3 yrs	Yes	Yes
Jasmine	Yes	No	No	2-3 yrs	Yes	No
Jelena	Yes	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	Yes
Jill	Yes	No	No	6-12 mths	Yes	Yes
Karina	Yes	No	No	18 mths-2 yrs	No	No
Katy	Yes	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	Yes
Kitt	Yes	No	No	18 mths-2 yrs	Yes	Yes
Latifah	Yes	No	No	0-3 mths	Yes	Yes
Lucy	Yes	No	No	6-12 mths	Yes	Yes
Maeve	Yes	No	No	12-18 mths	Yes	Yes
Misha	Yes	No	No	2-3 yrs	Yes	Yes
Natalie 055 (2)	Yes	No	No	6-12 mths	Yes	Yes
Rina	Yes	Yes	Yes	3-4 yrs	Yes	Yes
Rosie	Yes	No	No	0-3 mths	No	No
Ruby	Yes	No	No	18 mths-2 yrs	Yes	No
Stella	Yes	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	Yes
Tasha	Yes	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	No
Victoria	Yes	Yes	Yes	3-4 yrs	Yes	Yes
Vila	Yes	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	Yes
Yasmin	Yes	No	No	18 mths-2 yrs	Yes	Yes
Zadie	Yes	No	No	6-12 mths	No	No
Adriana	No	No	No	12-18 mths	No	No
Alyssa	No	No	No	6+ yrs	Yes	No
Casey	No	No	No	2-3 yrs	Yes	Yes
Catherine	No	Yes	Yes	18 mths-2 yrs	No	No
Chloe	No	No	No	3-6 mths	No	No

Dana	No	No	No	5-6 yrs	No	No
Edina	No	No	No	6+ yrs	No	No
Elishima	No	No	No	18 mth -2 yrs	Yes	Yes
Erin	No	No	No	6-12 mths	No	No
Frankie	No	No	Yes	12-18 mths	No	No
Irene	No	No	No	2-3 yrs	No	No
Jane	No	Yes	No	6+ yrs	No	No
Kaja	No	No	No	12-18 mths	Yes	No
Kim	No	No	No	12-18 mths	Yes	Yes
Lynne	No	Yes	Yes	2-3 yrs	Yes	Yes
Michaela	No	Yes	Yes	6-12 mths	No	No
Miriam	No	Yes	Yes	18 mths-2 yrs	Yes	Yes
Neneh	No	No	No	4-5 yrs	Yes	No
Nicolette	No	No	No	6+ yrs	No	No
Patsy	No	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	No
Pru	No	No	No	6-12 mths	Yes	Yes
Rebecca	No	No	No	3-6 mths	Yes	Yes
Samiira	No	No	No	2-3 yrs	Yes	Yes
Zoe	No	Yes	Yes	6+ yrs	Yes	No

## Appendix A(iii): Participant demographic information

Participants	Age	Ethnicity	Employment	Accommodation	Children
Abi	22	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Alice	22	Black British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Amy	32	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Bette	37	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Carla	46	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Charlene	26	Black British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Dawn	43	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Diane	37	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Emma	19	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Jacki	49	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Janelle	27	Black British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Janine	44	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Jasmine	22	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Jelena	23	White other european	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Jill	30	White British	No - never employed	Homeless	Yes
Karina	30	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Katy	50	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Kitt	34	Black British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Latifah	18	Asian British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No

Lucy	31	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Maeve	29	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Misha	23	Black British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Natalie 055 (2)	32	Black British	No - never employed	Homeless	Yes
Rina	27	Mixed Ethnicity	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Rosie	29	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Ruby	19	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Stella	45	Mixed Ethnicity	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Tasha	20	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Victoria	31	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Vila	25	White other european	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Yasmin	49	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Zadie	47	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Adriana	20	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Alyssa	25	Black British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Casey	38	White British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Catherine	34	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Chloe	27	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Dana	24	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Edina	27	Asian British	Yes - any previous employment	Temporary accommodation	No

Elishima	27	Black British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Erin	31	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Frankie	23	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Irene	44	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Jane	41	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Kaja	32	White other european	Yes - any previous employment	Temporary accommodation	No
Kim	37	Black British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Lynne	52	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Michaela	23	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Miriam	48	Black British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	Yes
Neneh	23	Mixed Ethnicity	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Nicolette	33	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No
Patsy	49	Black British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Pru	52	White British	No - never employed	Stable accommodation available on release	Yes
Rebecca	35	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Homeless	Yes
Samiira	26	Black British	No - never employed	Temporary accommodation	No
Zoe	51	White British	Yes - any previous employment	Stable accommodation available on release	No

## Appendix A(iv): Participant crime-related needs

Participants	Alcohol	Drugs	MentalHealth	Relationship
Abi	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Alice	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Amy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Bette	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Carla	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Charlene	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Dawn	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Diane	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Emma	No	No	Yes	Yes
Jacki	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Janelle	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Janine	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Jasmine	No	No	No	No
Jelena	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Jill	Yes	Yes	No	No
Karina	No	No	Yes	No
Katy	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kitt	No	Yes	Yes	No
Latifah	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lucy	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Maeve	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Misha	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Natalie	No	Yes	No	No
Rina	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Rosie	No	No	Yes	No
Ruby	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Stella	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tasha	No	No	Yes	Yes
Victoria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Vila	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Yasmin	No	No	Yes	No
Zadie	No	No	No	No
Adriana	No	No	Yes	Yes
Alyssa	No	Yes	No	Yes
Casey	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Catherine	No	No	Yes	No
Chloe	No	Yes	Yes	No
Dana	No	No	No	Yes
Edina	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Elishima	No	Yes	No	Yes



Erin	No	No	No	No
Frankie	No	No	No	No
Irene	No	No	No	No
Jane	No	No	Yes	Yes
Kaja	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kim	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lynne	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Michaela	Yes	No	No	Yes
Miriam	Yes	Yes	No	No
Neneh	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Nicolette	No	No	Yes	Yes
Patsy	Yes	No	Yes	No
Pru	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rebecca	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Samiira	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Zoe	No	No	Yes	No

# Appendix A(v): Experiences of trauma and abuse

Participants	ChildhoodAbuse	DomesticAbuse	Trauma	Type.of.Trauma
Abi	No	Yes	Yes	Removal from family at 11.
Alice	Yes	Yes	Yes	Rape x3
Amy	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
Bette	Yes	Yes	Yes	Held at gunpoint against her will
Carla	Yes	Yes	Yes	Multiple bereavements
Charlene	No	No	Yes	Bullying/ Attacked by three people and left unconscious
Dawn	No	Yes	No	N/A
Diane	Yes	Yes	Yes	Loss of child/ Exploitation by partner(drugged, raped, taken pictures)
Emma	No	Yes	Yes	Repeated violent altercations
Jacki	Yes	Yes	Yes	Abandoned by mother at 12/Relinquishing custody of child due to threats from father/ Rape
Janelle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Death of twin brother/Moved alone from Jamaica at 13/Imprisonment at 15
Janine	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
Jasmine	No	No	Yes	Death of sister/Shooting and jailing of brothers
Jelena	Yes	Yes	Yes	Being held against her will/Gang involvement/Witness DA
Jill	Yes	No	Yes	On the streets and using drugs from 12
Karina	No	Yes	Yes	Unspecified abuse in childhood/Dad leaving unexpectedly
Katy	Yes	No	Yes	Removal of children/Loss of partner/Attacked by neighbourhood youths
Kitt	Yes	Yes	Yes	Witnessed DA. Rape. Dad involved in Yardie gangs
Latifah	Yes	No	Yes	Sent to Bangladesh against her will aged 12
Lucy	Yes	No	Yes	Removal of child/Partner committed murder
Maeve	Yes	No	Yes	Death of mother
Misha	Yes	Yes	Yes	Rapes/Gang rapes/Removal of children
Natalie	No	Yes	Yes	Death of grandparents (primary carers)/Abandoned by mother
Rina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Experienced racism in the family/Lived on the streets at 12-13/Removal of children
Rosie	No	Yes	Yes	Death of child. Fleeing from traveller community. Haemophiliac son.
Ruby	Yes	Yes	Yes	Death of brother and dad.
Stella	Yes	Yes	Yes	Abused by gang members linked to ex-partner

Tasha	Yes	Yes	Yes	Has existed in a very violent world. Experience of assault by police, friends. Dad abused sister
Victoria	Yes	Yes	Yes	Rape.
Vila	Yes	Yes	Yes	Rejected by family/Being forced to live in crack houses and feeling in danger
Yasmin	No	No	Yes	Death of mother
Zadie	No	Yes	No	N/A
Adriana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Removal of children
Alyssa	No	No	Yes	Made false allegations of abuse and was placed in care
Casey	Yes	Yes	Yes	Rape at 16/ Multiple bereavements
Catherine	Yes	No	Yes	Witness DA
Chloe	No	No	No	N/A
Dana	No	No	No	N/A
Edina	No	No	Yes	Sexual exploitation by gang involved men
Elishima	No	Yes	Yes	Witnessed DA against her mother
Erin	No	No	No	N/A
Frankie	No	No	No	N/A
Irene	No	No	Yes	Separation from child to come to UK
Jane	No	Yes	No	N/A
Kaja	No	Yes	No	N/A
Kim	No	Yes	Yes	Rape/ Trying to support 4 children whilst seeking asylum (allostatic load)
Lynne	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
Michaela	No	Yes	No	N/A
Miriam	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
Neneh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Discovered at 14 that her dad was not her biological father/Witnessed DA
Nicolette	No	No	Yes	Baby and grandmother died
Patsy	No	No	No	N/A
Pru	Yes	Yes	Yes	Only one of family adopted. Children removed. Abandoned at 18. Raped at 13. PTSD diagnosis
Rebecca	Yes	No	Yes	Groomed into prostitution at 16/ Lost home, job, relationship
Samiira	Yes	No	Yes	Sent to Somlia for being too westernised/Diagnosed with PTSD
Zoe	No	No	Yes	Attempted rape and assault

## Appendix B: Reflective Journal from the interviewing phase of the research

- 05/04/2013 I contacted Mr Woolsey today proposing a qualitative, longitudinal study with intended outcomes that are both theoretical and practical. He responded very favourably to this. Over the past week I have started to make sense of the PhD application process and started completing the forms. Dennis informed me there was a chance of a different type of funding (not quite sure what it is). An application for this has to be submitted by 26/04/2013. Den is going to put something together then send it to me. I don't mind admitting I am completely confused about the financial aspect of this project. I have put together a PhD proposal which I sent to Phil Clements.
- 11/04/2013 Phil responded confirming that the university will fully fund my PhD. I am starting to feel so excited about the project. I want to spend all my time on it and feel I am letting my other work slip a little. I need to find a way to balance my time more. But perhaps there will just be periods when this takes up more time and others when my teaching takes up more time. I guess the beginning of any project is always quite an intense time. I contacted Mr Woolsey and requested numbers of women leaving Holloway each month so I can start thinking about size of cohort and also about my access to the prison. I suggested that I could start data collection in August. I hope I am not jumping the gun with that, but I am concerned that if this loses momentum, I will lose the project so I'm keen to keep it progressing.
- 16/04/2013 I emailed David Carpenter to establish what I need to do for an ethical review of the project as I think this has to happen before anything else can. He sent my email on to Jane Winstone who has brought a lot of blurred information into focus for me. I now have all the forms I need to complete for ethical review. It feels so difficult though as you need to be quite sure about the research before you start. I really want to take feminist approach to this study and, as I understand it, that would involve allowing room for the participants to direct the development of the project. But maybe I just need to state that in the ethics forms to allow room for this to happen.
- 22/04/2013 Spoke to Jane today which further clarified what is required for the REC. It was interesting to speak to her about her PhD which was a similar design to this one. I am avoiding calling it mine for some reason. I don't have a great sense of ownership of the project yet. Anyway, it was good to talk to Jane and feel like I have someone I can ask questions I feel I should already know the answer to. I am meeting Jacki on Weds so will

try and have made some definite progress by then. I am terrible at finishing things so having set these meetings as deadlines will be useful.

24/04/2013 I am starting to think about keeping my practice bias in check in relation to this project. I have been reading a lot about desistance over the past few days for another piece of work. I am conscious that knowledge suggesting a person's self-belief and internal transformation in desistance resonates with me. I am aware that I have underlying values and beliefs that mean I accept these issues as central to the change process much easier than I do more practical issues such as employment. I am conscious that if I go into this research expecting or wanting this to be true, I will find that it is. This could influence how I conduct the interviews as well as how I analyse the data from them. Therefore I will need to explore how to best manage this.

08/05/2013 Exchanged emails with George and have arranged to do a presentation about the research at HMP Hollway's SMT meeting on 09/07/2013 – then to all staff at the beginning of August. I am also going to create some posters and leaflets to put around the prison in time for this. I feel quite comfortable about undertaking this which I think is because of my experience of working in a female prison or a prison environment generally. It feels like George and I are working collaboratively on this and that he is as enthusiastic about the project as I am.

16/05/2013 Had a brief chat with Jane about my ethics forms and she advised me that I should add something about managing the expectations of the participants and the prison. Once this is complete, it can go to the ethics committee. I also showed her my interview topics and possible questions which she suggested were too interrogative. I realised I was quite offended and frustrated by this. I tried to explain that I would not ask the questions in a questionnaire fashion but that the questions represented prompts. Jane questioned my ability to complete in depth interviews in the time frame to which I responded to that I was used to doing in-depth interviews expediently from interviewing for PSRs. I understood Jane's response to this to suggest that PSR interviews are not 'in-depth' interviews. I bristle at this because, whilst I know some PSR interviews are completed mechanically, I pride myself on never succumbing to this. I pride myself my ability to get to the crux of issues in a way that feels supportive and collaborative to the person, but does not require hours and hours of interviewing. Not only do I have my probation experience of this, but my counselling experience too. I feel confident about doing these interviews. There are things about this project I am not confident about, but feel in a very good position to get the interviews right. I also really value my knowledge, skills and experience from Probation and did not like to hear it

being dismissed or assessed as potentially detrimental to the research. I do not believe it will be – but it is useful that it has been raised so that I can observe whether I am being too much of a Probation Officer. That said, my approach to probation has always been person-centred. I was never a punitive, controlling, directive probation officer, so I am not likely to take on that approach now.

29/05/2013 I spent yesterday completing the IRAS form for NOMS. It feels like everything is now ready to be processed. I am feeling – I'm not sure how to describe it – maybe irritated actually, by the ethics process. It has been feeling like a hoop-jumping process that has little relevance to the project, especially because the impetus for it came from Holloway. However, I have reflected on this more today and realised how much I have learnt from this process. I have had to consider issues such as data protection, confidentiality, interviewing, potential ethical dilemmas in much more detail than I would have had I not had to complete this process. I think my 'irritation' is actually a fear that the project will be held up. It feels like I can't afford for this to happen – in that if it does, I may lose this opportunity. I accept that I have to see my supervisors as holding knowledge that I don't have, rather than obstacles. To do the best I can with this, I need to draw on as many people's knowledge as possible.

03/06/2013 Met with Malcolm and Jane to go through the memo of agreement. Both provided some useful additions to what was already included.

04/06/2013 Ethics forms have been submitted. It feels like the first stage is completed – a small achievement. I am not always great at finishing things but the fact I have completed all this so quickly and got it in I think indicates how important this project feels to me. Jane has been very complimentary about my progress this week, and commented on how quickly I have got it all together. For me, there was no question. It needed to be completed this quickly to ensure this proceeds. I feel that I have a real 'can do' attitude to this research. Whatever needs doing will be done type of approach. But anyway, this ethics process has been frustrating at times, but it hasn't been hard. I haven't found it difficult to produce what is needed. I accept now that this process is going to involve what feels like jumping through hoops, but what is actually contributing to the learning process.

18/07/2013 I attended the prison on 09/07/2013 and presented the project to the Reducing Reoffending Dept. I was there for part of their general meeting and was really impressed by all the agency support they have. The team seemed really interested in the research. It was exciting and frustrating in equal measures as meetings go as it was discovered that I would have to wait until mid-August to be allocated keys. In the week

since the meeting I have been developing some publicity materials to put around the prison. I have some reservations about advertising the project and making claims for it that may not be accurate, but at the same time I need to generate enough interest for women to come forward and volunteer. So that's been the fun stuff. More annoyingly, I emailed NOMS to chase up the application and was told that it had got lost in the ether. Then when it was found they told me I had completed the wrong form and they needed the excel form!!! Despite my having checked this with at least 3 people. I have now just completed that and sent it off. I am less optimistic about being able to get started at the beginning of August now but that may not be disastrous. It would give me a little more preparation time and after August, I can still get to the prison a couple of times a week if need be.

02/08/2013 I arranged to attend Holloway today to drop off the information leaflets I have had made and discuss final preparations for the interviews. I met with Tricia Leatham and she printed off a list for me of all the sentenced women due for release in the next six months. We also discussed me getting keys though this does not seem likely now until later in the month. Tricia said I could start anyway and be escorted around. I am loathe to do this is a way. Having worked in a prison, I remember how frustrating it is being reliant on others to move around. On the other hand, I am keen to use this month to make a start on the project. A few of the women on the list to be released in 6 months were on the resettlement unit today and agreed to take part in the study on will be seeing two of the them on Tuesday. It feels very exciting that this is actually getting off the ground. I am actually about to start gathering data. In a way I feel a little unprepared. I know how I want to conduct my interviews. I have been interviewing people who have committed crime for many years now and have learnt about interviewing for research purposes through my Masters. Yet there is a part of me that feels like I am faking it. I'm not sure why. I know that I have a wealth of experience of working with this group of women and in-depth knowledge about issues for women in the CJS. So it is annoying that I still feel a little sense of unworthiness almost about this project. The flip side of that feeling though is a sense that at last I am engaged with something that will allow me to work on a project I have devised in a way that feels right to me (almost regardless of how it is viewed by others). I went to a seminar given by Loraine Gelsthorpe a couple of weeks ago when she was critical of the design of a research study. It made me think really carefully about the 'robustness' of my design. However, when I read about constructivist grounded theory, it makes complete sense to me as the appropriate approach to this project. No other methodology seems as suited

to it. Perhaps the doubts are simply inexperience. I am doubting my chosen methodology because it is the first time I have conducted a major research project and I know the world social sciences love quantitative methods. I need to develop a bit more confidence in myself and my management of this research.

06/08/2013 Just back from my first day of interviewing. I am so stimulated by this project. It is such a nice feeling. I don't know how it feels for the women, but for me it feels like we really are sharing knowledge. Like I am working with them. I have only done two interviews but they have felt collaborative and authentic. I had been having slight concerns that having been out of Probation for nine months now, my ability to relate to the women might be a bit rusty. It didn't feel like that at all. It felt like a genuine exchange of information. I am genuinely interested in them so 'authenticity' is completely effortless on my part. It's hard to know what it felt like for them, but they both seemed happy and relaxed at the end of the sessions which indicates it was a positive experience for them.

07/08/2013 I had a really productive day today, though one that took me right out of my comfort zone. I interviewed three women. I was reminded by 'Carla' of why I find working with women offenders so rewarding. I spoke to her yesterday on the unit about the project and was immediately aware of lots of assumptions I was making about her. She is an older prisoner and looks like she has endured years of substance abuse. She was very enthusiastic about the research and keen to be involved. I was looking forward to having her in the group of participants as the women I had spoken to prior to her (4 including yesterday) were all quite eloquent, educated and reflective. I assumed Carla wasn't. When talking about her experiences I was reminded of the amazing capacity women who come into prison have to survive and retain hope in their lives. More than that, to really reflect on their experiences and take responsibility for their futures. Despite everything, Carla was as reflective, thoughtful and hopeful. I felt really privileged to meet her and it gave me even more faith in women's ability to survive. It makes so much sense to me that the Feminists of the 1970s chose that word to define women. That was not what took me out of my comfort zone though. That was having to do a presentation about the research to the full staff meeting. I wish I could get more comfortable about giving presentations. George and Tricia thought it was quite hilarious that a lecturer gets stage fright (well stage anxiety anyway, fright is a little strong). However, I did it and it was OK. Not great but acceptable. At the end, the Social Worker from the mental health unit approached me and said she would mention the research to women she sees, which reminded me of the benefits of putting myself out there.



- 09/08/2013 Completed another two interviews today. At the end of the first week the thing that has jumped out at me about the women's stories is the sense of crippling responsibility the women experienced. All seven of the women I have spoken with this week have had huge 'burdens' to bear from early in life as a result of the breakdown in their parents' relationships, bereavement, the loss of partners. There is a real sense of them being relied upon and this eventually becoming too much for them. They also all seemed to take personal responsibility for their lives. They all expressed the belief that any changes in their life could only be directed by them. This sense of responsibility strikes me as something that may be different for women and men.
- 12/08/2013 I had my first relatively unsuccessful interview this afternoon. I completed two this morning. This afternoon's was with 'Emma.' When I approached FG last week to take part, she spoke about problems she was having getting tobacco and asked if I could help her. I advised her to speak to her wing officers, but was concerned that she had only agreed to take part in the research because she thought I could provide her with tobacco or because she wanted information on how to get it. I felt conflicted about this over the weekend. In a way, it feels like it should be OK for me to give the women who participate a cigarette. I really want them to feel valued, and giving them something they value feels like an easy way to do this. However, I know the currency cigarettes have in prison and to put myself in a situation where women are participating with the expectation of some kind of physical reward is likely to escalate extremely quickly. It would also undermine their participation. At the moment, I know the women who are engaging are doing so because they want to. There is no tangible reward for doing so. This maintains the authenticity of the discussions which is very important to me. FG turned up for the interview but after 15 minutes asked if we could finish. She had been quite monosyllabic during the discussion and I could feel myself asking lots of questions to try to encourage her to respond. Everything about this felt wrong in this context. As a Probation Officer, I had a remit about gathering information both for the Court but also knowing that I could use the information I gathered to identify and access services for the women. I am not in that position now. I cannot now offer services and help in exchange for information. This is why the women entering into this voluntarily is so important. After 15 minutes, FG asked to terminate the interview just at the point when she had disclosed she had spent half her life in a mental hospital and was now 'here.' I ended the interview explaining that she could resume at any time should she wish to do so. I think I could have handled this session much better though. I knew on my first contact with her on Friday that she was vulnerable and young. I could

see she wasn't entirely focused on what I was saying to her on Friday. I needed to have prepared her better for the session so she could really make an informed discussion about whether to participate. When I could see she was being unresponsive to certain questions about her life, I should have changed my approach. With hindsight, focusing on FG's future goals and talking more generally about past experiences may have helped her relax and feel more comfortable with the process. Also, on seeing her discomfort, I should have checked she was feeling OK to continue. All important learning for the remainder of the sessions as I'm sure FG won't be the last interview that does not proceed as planned.

13/08/2013 I completed two interviews today but also had my first no show. That felt disappointing, but is something I expect I will have to get used to. I have been thinking I have been very lucky so far both in the number of women willing to take part and that they have all shown up for the interview. So far, no-one I have approached to participate has declined. The two interviews I did complete were, again, astonishingly insightful. Every time I interview someone at the moment, I feel completely inspired by them. Survival, hope, responsibility, determination are words that just keep coming into my head when listening to the women.

14/08/2013 I had one interview today, one other did not show. Both the no-shows have been from H1 (the detox unit) which I am sure contributes to the person's ability to engage. The interview today was also a new reception with substance misuse problems. She was the first person I have interviewed so far who was obviously experiencing the effects of methadone as she is currently on a high dose. There were periods when she would jump up and walk around the room, points when she became really animated then other points when it looked like she was falling asleep. I was thankful for my experience in interviewing people under the influence because I knew not to let it impact on my response to her. Given the time and space and being patient about some of the more unusual behaviours meant despite her intoxication, the interview was extremely worthwhile. At the end, she encouraged her friend to participate saying how good the experience had been. This was good to hear as it was verification for me that the women are experiencing the interviews as something positive.

15/08/2013 I am starting to get a little concerned now as I had two people fail to show up today. It feels so disappointing. It is a bit of a struggle to identify participants at the moment. Because I don't have keys I am reliant on the women in the resettlement unit. Luckily, there are lots of services in resettlement which means there are quite a few women on the unit every day. However, it would be much easier I think to recruit people if I could

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access other areas of the prison more easily. I managed to do one interview. Despite all the lost time the prison regime involves for me, I try to remind myself that even if it takes all day to get one interview, that is worthwhile. Every interview is really valuable.

Interviewed Rosie today. I've been thinking a lot about the resilience of the women I'm working with but Rosie takes resilience to a whole new level. Terminally ill child who later died, another child with haemophilia, escaped a DV relationship and the traveller community. Continues to be taunted and bullied on facebook and through people she knows who are still in the community – yet she's hopeful. She has a vision for her future and the future of her child that does not include crime, prison, violence. She reminded me that another theme that keeps emerging from these interviews is the understanding the women have that they have to change their lives; they can't rely on anyone else to make things change for them, they really understand and seem to accept that they are masters of their own destiny. I was reading about case studies and the value of using 'out-lier' cases to explore a phenomenon. Rosie is one such case I think; that evidence of this resilience and responsibility in someone in her circumstances lends credence to the idea it is a trait of a number of women. I left the interview with a real sense of wanting to help her, save her. I recognise this feeling from working with women in probation and never quite untangled what that need was about. There is something that makes me want to make everything better for these women. Although I responded to some men in this way too, I always experienced it with the women I worked with. I somehow could really bring them as whole beings into focus, whereas the men I worked with I sometimes still reduced to certain labels they had on them or behaviours they had engaged with. This came up for me with Rosie because although I am working hard to ensure this project is as collaborative as possible and does not in any way exploit the participants, the fact is that I am going to be the primary beneficiary of it. That said, some women have said afterwards that they have found it 'like a counselling session' or have spoken about things they had never spoke of before which suggests they are experiencing involvement as helpful. Moving forward though, I don't think I can or should ignore the desire to help and to help when I can. It is a tenet of feminist research that if you are bringing a participant into the research, you have some responsibility to them. It adds to the reciprocity of the relationship. So when I got home I searched for support groups for Irish traveller women who had left their communities as a result of domestic violence. I found nothing. Rosie had said this was the case but I found it hard to believe given there seems to be support groups for everything in London. I emailed Solace Women's Aid to ask if they knew of any services as they had been involved in a

conference of DV in traveller communities with an organisation called Friends, Families, Travellers. I told Rosie I would see what I could find and will pass on any information.

20/08/2013 Part of me feels like I am observing myself undertaking these interviews. I am watching myself respond to each of the women and seeing my emotions and feeling them at the same time. I met with Tasha today. She looks about 16 and is completely childlike in her interactions. Eager to please. Insecure. She looks innocent in an angelic way. But her offending had been violent – related to mental health problems. I've been stuck by the fact that there are so many women in Holloway that don't need to be there. I have read about women being imprisoned for non-violent offences etc but never really appreciated the extent of it until now. When I worked in Downview I worked with high risk women. So there is that group, the frauds, thefts, drug offending that don't feel serious enough to warrant prison. Then there are women like Tasha who on meeting is immediately so vulnerable that prison seems that last place she should be. Yet the other side of this is that they seem to thrive in Holloway. The women seem to become the best version of themselves in there. None of the women have really had a bad word to say about Holloway so far (except for about the food). They speak of the support from the officers and civilian staff and the helpfulness of talking to the other prisoners. It really doesn't sit well with me. I have always been pretty much abolitionist about prison – especially women's prisons. But speaking to the women in Holloway is making me feel that they need prison to get better, as a safe haven almost. It's tragic beyond words that society has allowed this to happen. I feel when I listen to the interviews again, I need to really have an ear out for what they are saying is so helpful about Holloway, because it feels like supporting desistance for these women will involve a Holloway without walls – a way of replicating whatever it is that holds the women whilst they are in there in the community.

21/08/2013 I was reminded today of how normalized hearing the lifestyles of people in prison has become for me. Amy described a life that involved what would be interpreted as sex work – but what she was doing was more complex than that. She described her boyfriend and girlfriend who were in her life at the same time. Her offence involved stealing from a 91 year old punter. During the interview, I could hear myself in my head nonchalantly explaining her life; "those actions makes sense because of x, y, z;" "that's because of the other thing that happened." I realised how unphased I was by her story and suddenly aware of how – there's no other word for it really – how weird her lifestyle would probably sound to others. Not because they can't empathise with her or are critical of her, but just because it would sound so 'abnormal.' Yet to me, again it was

one of the more extreme examples of – I don't want to call it dysfunction – in a way it's the opposite of that. It's a determination to function, but not in a way that is conventionally recognisable. I think part of me thinks because I have been so exposed to these 'unconventional' lifestyles, that they are not unconventional. But then I realise that is not the case. It will be interesting to see how this goes with analysing the material. Do I work at being Joe Public without knowledge in order to identify what is worth exploring or do is the fact that these stories are normal to me useful in pulling out what is worth exploring. I'm not shocked by the stories. I'm moved and experience a range of emotional responses when the women speak to me, but never shock. I really have heard it all before. I don't quite know yet whether this will make me more or less alert to what they are telling me.

- 22/08/2013 Had a very uplifting interview today with ET. Again, a hugely resilient woman. Determined and focused from a young age. What stood out about Irene was her humour. It felt like we spent the whole hour laughing – despite the difficulty she had experienced that resulted in her imprisonment and some uncertainty that awaits her on release. I keep smiling just thinking about her.
- 27/08/2013 Today was really inspirational. It might sound insincere, especially as I commented a few days ago about how I had heard all the stories before. I still feel that but today realised that despite that, I am still noticing. By that I mean I am still touched in different ways by the individuals and their stories, even if the stories are similar. Lynne was a perfect example of this. I left the interview completely inspired by the progress she has made from totally unfunctioning alcoholic. She's a peer mentor for Phoenix Futures (D&A service). Expressed real insight into her problems. Has been engaging in psychotherapy which at 53 has been really challenging for her but she knows it will be of benefit in the long run so is putting herself through it. It comes back to the hope, resilience, responsibility. A willingness to take charge and accept responsibility for her life even though she's 53 and has had a serious alcohol problem for over 20 years. I left again with a sense of really wanting to help her. I guess it's not sitting entirely comfortably with me that I am hearing these stories then not doing anything tangible to help. In Probation, there was a reason for me delving into their lives. There is a reason to this, and a potentially very important one, but it feels intangible and it's hard to make that adjustment. The flip side of that though is the authenticity I am able to offer the women. I am hearing them really without judgement, without any agenda (that will impact on them personally.) I know from feedback I am getting from them that they are finding it a helpful process to go through.

3 & 5/09/2013 Have had two sessions with Rina – over 2 hours worth of interview. She has brought home to me all the little headlines that have been flitting around my head about the interviews so far. Particularly the women's experiences of being isolated in some way from those they should be close to. Most of them have spoken about experiences that have left them isolated and unsure of who they are. Rina spoke about this at length. It's something that still frightens her. She has no idea who she is. She has used drugs from the age of 9 and is so afraid to stop because she has no notion of who she is without them. But still, even against this backdrop, she hadn't lost hope. She is hoping for change, she's determined to change but is 'terrified' of what that actually means. I noticed lots of contradictions in Rina's story and thought processes. I noticed myself noticing these and questioning it in my head. I felt I wanted to get to the 'truth.' But then remembered that's not what this is about. I was giving Rina space to explore her story and I will analyse it later to see what it means in terms of desistance. What she is choosing to present is important and that is a truth of her life. Despite inconsistencies, themes did come up consistently and the word she used most consistently was 'fear.' This is the important stuff, not whether she is truly ready to stop taking drugs etc. Rina provided me with some great feedback. She asked for a copy of her interview on CD so she can listen to it as said she has not said some of the things she said in the interview before. It's such a great idea and real endorsement that the session was helpful to her and she didn't experience it as exploitative.

16/09/2013 Today was my first day back at Holloway after over a week away (due to leave). I was conscious of a feeling that the break had resulted in a loss of momentum for me. I had been very caught up in the project prior to going away, then being away from it I started questioning the value of it. I am still very concerned that this research has real value for women in the CJS. I don't just want it to be research for research's sake. I suppose there is value in all research – but I want it to have a tangible worth. Anyway, my participant turned up and had a really engaging story to tell and afterwards I felt on a real high. I think that came from an awareness that I am collecting testimony from these women about their lives in a way no-one has for them before. It's funny but in all the clinical and therapeutic roles I have held, I have never been able to employ the principles of person-centred work so honestly. Prue reminded me of something that has been flitting around in terms of what the women are talking about. She spoke a lot about sex. I am finding this coming up as a subject frequently. I'm not sure whether this is because the women are deprived of it, because many of them have worked in the sex industry, or for other reasons sex has been a significant part of their lives.

- 20/09/13 Completed one interview today but the main issue to arise from Holloway was that the Security Dept refused permission for me to record the interviews. George approached the Gov assuming she would overturn the decision but she didn't. George said she has concerns about the recording getting into the press. I wrote a letter to the Gov explaining how essential it is that I am able to record the interviews. I am hoping that her response was simply because she had not realised that recording was essential. However, I have already started to make plans for if she decides to pull the plug. These involve trying to offer the project to a different establishment or working solely with the 25 women I have already spoken to. I am fairly confident everything will be OK. Apart from this, I had a very good day at Holloway. I only saw one person but recruited 6 more for the project who were all very enthusiastic about it.
- 26/09/2013 Interviewed one woman today. She is in custody for making calls to the emergency services. Mental health problems have been spoken about by many of the women. What I'm picking up about their treatment is that the focus seems to be on treating the symptom rather than the cause. And there do seem to be causes. The story of today's participant was one of severe neglect and abuse as a child leading to alcoholism in adulthood and mental health problems. She is desperately lonely and craves attention. Her offence is such a clear reflection of her mental state, her needs. It feels like it should be easy to solve – she's chatty, sociable, interesting. There should be community groups she can access to build her social life. But even that would be treating a symptom rather than the root – because at the root she needs ways to come to terms (on whatever level that might be) with the trauma she has experienced. She loves prison on lots of levels. She feels accepted there and the women offer her support and companionship that is not available to her outside. This is something that has come up a few times in the interviews and may be something tangible the prison can do – use the women as a resource to help each other. After the session she thanked me and told me she had enjoyed talking to me.
- 30/09/2013 Both my interviews fell through today which was really disappointing. One woman had been released, another changed her mind about being involved. However, because of this I went up the wing and got talking to two women, one of whom was on an IPP. We had an in-depth discussion about whether people are born evil, whether people's experiences impact on their behaviour and the injustice of IPPs! I don't know why it surprises me - that level of discussion I find myself having with the women in Holloway, but I keep being so pleasantly surprised. I guess it gives me hope – that despite everything they have been through, they are still functioning women with opinions,

ideas and intelligence. It reinforces my belief in this project in that their ideas and thoughts on the CJS are so much more valid than any that could come out of a university or a practitioner. When I was counselling and trying to apply that theory to work with offenders, I struggled at first with the notion of trusting them to work towards their own self-actualisation – but they can be trusted with it, as we all can. They can be trusted with this project – to think about it in relation to their lives and express their thoughts productively and positively. Unfortunately, the woman with the IPP has no release date yet so cannot be included in the study. I am seeing the other one on Thursday.

03/10/2013 Interviewed CGS today. What was really stark about this interview was the notion of being labelled. Again, it is something that is recurring in these sessions, but CGS spoke about it very specifically today. She is 23 years old and has been in custody on and off since the age of 15. She feels that the system has given up on her. She spoke of wanting to go from prison to rehab but of how difficult it is to convince people that just because she has not been motivated in the past...actually not unmotivated, but was just so daunted by the prospect of change that she could not engage with it. Now she feels ready but is finding it hard to have people take her seriously. She expressed a strong belief that she could change her life. She is conscious of the fact that she is young and therefore has an opportunity to exercise some control over her future, but she feels like she is going to have to do this alone. Her story – I was about to say was at the extreme end of the abuse that is prevalent in these women's lives, but thinking back on some others, it's depressingly normal. Dad is in custody on an IPP. Her mum is a drug user and has used CGS all her life to get drugs. CGS identified her issues as being related to her relationship with her mother. She also has serious self-harming behaviour. It was a saddening session. I'm always conscious of ensuring I end the sessions on positives. I'm not sure where this stands really in relation to trying not to impact on the direction of the session, but as a human being and as someone who knows how to manoeuvre conversation and positively reframe etc, I feel I have a responsibility to the women to ensure they do not leave the sessions feeling low.

07/10/2013 Saw two women today. Labelling came up again with the second. She has some very 'prison' tattoos on her face and the rest of her body. She is 44 and is the first person to really express a complete lack of hope about living differently to how she is now. This was partly due to her tattoos. She said she feels they would prevent her from being accepted by mainstream society. They do very much identify her as (as she described herself) a 'non-conformist.' That said, she was very reflective about her situation. She



admitted she does not want to be in prison anymore but said that realistically although she doesn't want to come back, she probably will come back. She also expressed fear about changing – about becoming someone different, about doing things differently. She admitted she prefers to stick to what she knows. The significant thing about Kath is that she has spent most of her life in custody. From the age of 15 to 44, the longest period she has been in the community for is 18 months. She feels the system can do nothing for her, that if she is going to change, it will be down to her. The first interview was sad. The woman had been raped 3 times in her life which triggered schizophrenia and drug abuse. She self harms on her face because she 'didn't want to be pretty anymore.' Something is going so wrong that these women who go through so much as children end up in prison.

08/10/2013 I received a letter at work today from one of the women at Holloway. It was a great letter. She was expressing lots of opinions about how no-one listens to women and the interventions available don't meet their needs. She wants to be involved in the project. I wrote back to her having put her in the diary to see me.

20/11/2013 It's a while since I have completed this diary. In the time since the last interview I have only completed 2 interviews due mainly to my teaching commitments, but also had a couple of interviews fall through (one changed her mind and one had a visit). But what prompted me to write today was a conference I attended yesterday called Women Offenders: Less Talk, More Action. A jotted down a couple of phrases that resonated with some of the themes coming out of the interviews. These were around taking a different perspective on women. Wm are multi-disadvantaged rather than have complex needs. When we talk of women having complex needs, it suggests they are lacking in some way, are a burden, need looking after (infantilising). Locus of control – wm say things like 'I need them to give me a house' because they do not have the self-esteem, belief in themselves to consider they can achieve things like this independently. So we demand a focus on changing the system (there should be better provision, more support) but maybe there needs to be more focus on increasing women's self esteem. Supremacy of the discourse of the 'self.' Focus is on responsabilization – accepting guilt, rather than on whether the person will offend again. The dominant group in society are always invisible from discussions about oppression. White people absent when talking about race, heterosexuals invisible when talking about homophobia, gender issues always about women. The further you are from the power base the more at risk you are. We need to be able to understand why an offence has been committed without condoning it. Differentiate between understanding and acceptance. There has been a

professionalization of 'care.' For women offenders, being seen to be doing OK by outsiders is very important. I made a link with WIP too and have just emailed them about supporting the project.

26/11/2013 Interviewed Nenah today.

02/12/2013 Interviewed Alyssa. I was faced with an ethical dilemma as, as she was telling her story, I realised that she is the co-d of Edina. Edina had not told me the nature of her offence as she had been too ashamed, but Alyssa was clearly prepared to talk about it. When there was a break in her story, I explained that Edina had also taken part in the project and checked that was OK with her, which it was. I decided not to say that Edina had not told me the nature of the offence as I thought the best approach was to say as little as possible about my conversation with her. A strong theme that emerged from Alyssa's interview that has come up numerous times already was the shame of being labelled as an offender and in Alyssa's case, even more damagingly as a sex offender. The difficulty with this for her is that it is at odds with how she sees herself. She also is clearly carrying a lot of guilt about everything that happened in her life and for what she perceives as the damaging impact she has had on other people's lives. Yet in her early childhood was, again, experiences of having very adult responsibilities from a very young age (6).

04/12/2013 Attended a half day conference today at LSBU on gendering desistance. It was really exciting to meet other people who are researching this topic. Being new to this, I have tended to feel quite protective of what I am doing – a bit afraid to talk about it. But I realised today that I don't need to feel like that. That speaking to others who are researching similar issues is a way of generating ideas and challenging your own ideas. It was the first time I have been to any discussion where the desistance research has been critiqued. Not criticised, but people actually pointed out the ways in which it was limited in terms of what it can tell us about women's desistance journeys. I have seen Maruna, Farrall and McNeill speak on several occasions now both individually and together and have always had this sense that gender has been ignored other than as a variable. The desistance literature has not devoted any real attention to understanding how women's desistance journeys and narratives are different to men's. It's the age old criminology issue – as a discipline it remains gender blind – if not blind, very short sighted.

The conference also made me feel slightly overwhelmed by my project. The others that other people are doing seem so much more contained and doable. I think this is because I am starting to make contact with the first few women who have been released for their follow-up interviews and it is making me quite anxious on a couple of

contrasting levels. Firstly, I am anxious about being able to re-engage them. Secondly, I am anxious about being able to manage my work, interviews in the prison and follow-up interviews without totally sacrificing everything else in my life. The first issue is problematic for me on a personal level I recognise because I can lack assertiveness at times and am uncomfortable at the thought of calling the women. I'm not entirely sure why this is. I know the experiences they have had of the project so far have been positive from their feedback. So I realise this is an aspect of the project I struggle with that is to do with my personality. I am also a little overwhelmed by the potential of it all. It was mentioned yesterday that although women have been spoken to about what they need at the end of their journeys (ie from Probation etc), no-one has really looked at the process women go through on the 'road from crime' – which is what I am trying to achieve. It makes me fluctuate between feeling like an imposter and brimming with confidence about where this can go.

09/12/2013 Interviewed Erin today. She is a first time offender but convicted of fraud and admitted to having committed fraud on 4 occasions. There are a few of the women who I have felt I have not got their full stories and Erin is one. The Probation Officer in me was very concerned about this at the start of the project, until I reminded myself that my task here is not about necessarily getting the full story but the parts of the story the women feel are important.

19/12/2013 Completed my first follow-up interview today. It left me with so many ideas and feelings. Catherine left prison quite set up. She was going back to her own home, to her children and her husband who works in Social Services. She has a job lined up for when her tag comes off. On paper everything is well. When I opened the interview simply asking how things are going, she said she was really struggling. She is finding it hard to put into action the plans she had in prison for who she wanted to be when she came out. Her relationships with her partner and children are difficult. She is struggling financially. She said that if someone offered her £100,000 to commit a crime now and she knows she would have to spend a couple of years in Holloway for it, she would do it. I got a sense of her being completely overwhelmed by the responsibilities she has in her life. Another issue that came across was her sense of being judged by others; other mothers at school, staff at school. She lives in a small village and appears to be carrying around a real sense of shame about having been in prison. She identified a gap between her cognitive understanding of what she needed to do to make things better for herself and her emotional response to situations. She spoke about situations with her children and how she feels completely unable to assert herself with them. That in

her head, she knows what she has to do, but when she has tried her plans of action and they don't work, she has resorted to her old behaviour which was doing everything to please everyone else and not paying attention to her own needs. This is obviously really interesting because despite having all her practical needs met in terms of housing, job, family etc – Catherine is experiencing life as very difficult. And Holloway has become a symbol of her being almost at her best. In Holloway, she was a peer mentor, respected, assertive, clear about her future, trusted – she had an identity she was proud of. Outside, all that has been stripped from her and she has lost all sense of herself. Whether this leads to more crime remains to be seen. I doubt it. But it reveals something quite concerning about women's lives and maybe starts to explain why Holloway feels so safe to so many of them.

08/01/2014 Interviewed Jill. Left very shocked by her story. And surprised at my shock because it is a story I have heard several times during the course of this research. Her mother was an addict. She was given drugs at the age of 11. She was expelled from school at 13 for smoking crack in the toilets. She was first in custody at 15. She is now 29. She has 4 children who are looked after by her husband of 8 years. She has been in rehab a couple of times but couldn't maintain abstinence. She felt this was because the aftercare was not intensive enough. Her offending has been thefts and street robberies. If she is arrested again for street robbery, she will face a minimum 5 year sentence. She has also been a street worker. Before I interviewed her, everyone in the office was saying what a lovely woman she is. And she is. Her manner was very gentle, uncertain – having had her life, I guess certainty about anything is impossible. There was a real sense from Jill's story that she had never had a chance. She said by the age of 6, she was aware of drugs. She admitted to being someone who manipulates people and said that that is the only way she learnt how to be. It's what she grew up seeing her mother do. She told a story of a man who used to throw things from his window for her (money, sweets etc). She said he never asked anything from her, but as she got older she started exploiting him. She clearly felt guilty about the way she has treated people. I noted that she was born in a world outside of mainstream society and has pretty much been forced to stay there. She said, after her first stretch in youth custody, she asked to go back to school. She said she wanted to be given a chance but was told there was no point. She expressed a sense of having been written off at a very young age – which only left the option of following her mum. Yet still she has hope. She has set up her release so she is met at the gate, taken to her accommodation, accompanied to NA meetings. She is possibly going into accommodation that is dependent on her doing 90 NA meetings in 90 days.

She won't go and live with her husband and children until she is abstinent. She said she will see them regularly but doesn't want to do what her mum did and expose them to the drug world. But she knows she is fragile. She has known nothing other than drugs from a very young age. She admitted that she doesn't know how to be someone who is not living a drug addicts life; sleeping rough, prostitution, crime.

10/01/2014 Interviewed SM. It was a short interview because she had another appt and the most opaque in that she is 50 and has been in and out of prison for thefts for a long time. She identified her offending as being financially motivated. Has two adult children who are ill – one with MS. This was the first interview I have felt I haven't been able to strike up enough of a relationship quickly to help the person reflect deeply on their life. Maybe it's crazy to expect I can achieve that with all the participants. But I'm also a bit concerned that it is coming from me. I am feeling a bit tired.... It's hard to manage my time, it feels really challenging to keep recruiting participants, especially as I am now trying to catch up with other for follow up interviews. I have felt this week that I am maybe being too interrogative in the interviews whereas up to this point, I have really focused on not questioning, especially not around 'facts' of their lives. I'm forgetting to focus on the 'meaning' of events for them. Reflecting on this it seems clear that I am probably influencing the response so will approach the sessions next week conscious of the importance of how I engage with the sessions.

14/01/2014 Received a letter from Rina today at uni. After my last reflection on my sense of fatigue with the project, it was really inspiring. She is at Bronzefield and feels she is doing really well. She spoke about how important the project is to her and how much she wants to see it through. It made me feel so good about the project. I want so much for this to feel helpful to the women and for them to feel part of it. She included her partner's number as she was due for HDC this month. I called and he said she hadn't been granted it so will be getting out in April. He also said how much she was looking forward to hearing from me. It brought home to me the responsibility this project entails for some of the women. I know some will instantly forget about it, but for Rina, she said it feels like an integral part of her recovery.

29/01/2014 Today I gave a paper about my research for the first time. I was really nervous about presenting in front of colleagues. It was not something I had ever done before so also had that anxiety about the unknown. I had put something together but had no idea whether it was good or not. And I wanted it to be good. I know a lot of people in the department don't really know who I am and I wanted to impress, but in lots of ways I felt unprepared. It came in the middle of a busy week and after a few other busy

weeks that meant I didn't feel prepared enough. I also took some risks in the way I was presenting the research. It was really well-received. I was completely stunned at the end when Carol Hayden enthusiastically said how interesting it had been. And the speaker that followed me opened her session saying 'I'm not sure how you follow that.' Late on, everyone said it had been the best paper. I was overjoyed.

19/02/2014 Went to Holloway to try to get more participants for the project. I have been reluctant to accept that I won't have as many initial sessions completed by the end of March as I had hoped. I have been thinking about whether what I have is enough. In lots of ways, I know it is. There are plenty of published research studies out there with less than I have now. I'm really concerned about getting enough follow-ups. So I need to focus on this for a while but to do this need a break from interviewing at Holloway. So have decided to keep going at Holloway until I go away in April, then have May and June focusing on follow-ups. I have told Holloway I will have the first report to them by the end of July which will be a literature review and analysis of the anticipated desistance. Then go back into Holloway during July and August to do some more initial interviews. If I can keep to this schedule, I should have around 70 interviews to start with. I should be able to have 50 done by April then another 20 during August.

20/02/2014 interviewed CC. Drug dealer. She had lived outside of normal society from the age of 12 when her mum left and she started fending for herself. She spoke of her involvement with 'underground' groups – punks, drug users and dealers. She uses but believes this is in quite a controlled way now – she gets arrested for dealing. She has treated drug dealing like a job and clearly took some pride in her skill to do it well and the respect she had from others in this world. She calls herself by the name of a girl at school who she holds responsible for her having been expelled at an early age. There are mental health issues, domestic abuse, loss of children in her story. She is well linked in with services in the community but otherwise has no social network.

27/02/2014 Met AS who is the third woman I have interviewed who is in prison for a sexual offence. This was a direct contact offence though in that she was involved in a 'relationship' with a 13 year old boy. Jane had one of the most severe histories of domestic abuse I have ever heard. She still has a lot of confusion about why she committed the offence but at the same time showed a lot of insight. During the interview, I found myself in my head excusing her offence. Then, at one point, I remember thinking, if this was a man and the victim a girl, I would not accept this explanation. I would consider him a dangerous paedophile. But a man is highly unlikely to have ever experienced the level of DV that Jane did. It doesn't mean that what she did was not terrible – but it was so tied up with

her experiences. It was about control, a little revenge (as she acknowledged), a lack of self esteem, a deep-rooted fear of men. If a man did have a comparable story, maybe I would see the offence/risk in similar terms. It presents a challenge for me because Jane's victimisation needs to be acknowledged – but she herself is clearly not satisfied with that as an explanation for what she did and not acknowledging that – going along with a convenient reason rather than engaging in conversation about other reasons – will not be helpful to her. She is very fearful about her release and her PO appears to be taking a very punitive line with her so have printed off some info about her local Together Women centre. She self harms and we had spoken about the death of her twins (caused by her partner). I asked outright how she was feeling having spoken about this. She said it had brought things to the forefront of her mind (though she was not distressed in the interview) – so told her personal officer and completed her ACCT after the session.

05/03/2014 Interviewed Maeve today. I expressed at one point how her excitement about her future was so obvious and infectious. She relapsed into drug use after her mother died having been abstinent for 4 years and not having committed an offence for 6 years. She was able to relate her previous 'desistance' to starting a relationship – though she also said she was 'ready' when she met her ex. That said she is confident that she can stay abstinent again once released even if the relationship does not continue (at the moment it not ). Maeve said that she wasn't sure whether her offending and drug use were related – but for her, the fact that she didn't commit crime when she wasn't on drugs clearly indicated that it was. We discussed why this is and she spoke of how bad she felt about committing crime and that she only did it out of necessity – i.e to fund her drug use. Drugs started as a result of being placed in care due to abuse by her father and running away. She then ended up associating with other young runaways and older addicts in the west end. I was really struck by her enthusiasm and confidence in herself.

10/03/2014 Had what feels like one of a diminishing number of successful days today. In the morning I met Michaela for a follow-up. Things were going well for her after a slightly rocky start. She spoke lots about identity and using her time. She expressed lots and lots of ambition and focus. It was clear prison had interrupted a chaotic period in her life and she feels back on track now. She's a uni, living with her mum, step-dad and sister in a nice home and things are OK. The issue of identity came across very strongly though – much more than any practical concerns around resettlement.

In the afternoon I met AR. I noticed she had traits of PD – she indicated that she was aware of this a few times. She spoke of how she never had empathy for others, was prone to violence and aggression that seemed out of her control, she'd never loved anyone, has 7 children who are in the care of others. Her experiences of childhood were extremely challenging – one of 16 moved from Nigeria to UK. She was abused at the age of 5 and then from the age of 9-14, has had a couple of abusive relationships. I was reflecting on how I automatically I make these sorts of assessments of the women and wonder whether it impacts on the research. I try to practice 'mindful' interviewing so I stay very consciously with the person. But as soon as I recognise certain behaviours in them, I can't help but be aware of them. I can't undo what I know. I feel quite confident about being able to hold this knowledge and still work with the women in an open, non-judgemental way – but I guess I only have my assessment of this as no-one observes the interviews. I think it can be helpful – I know today I was thinking that K has these traits so I know it is best to interact with her. And the session felt positive and productive. Would being truly authentic mean telling her? I can't see how that would make sense at all. If I was her Probation Officer, I could work towards some sort of conversation around it, but in the role I have now and the limited contact I will have I can't see that level of authenticity being anything but detrimental. I remember this was a constant issue for me when training to be a counsellor. The double deviancy theory really struck me when speaking to K too. She defined herself as a challenging person – staff have labelled her that and the Probation Officer in me could see that she would be difficult to work with. But she has hopes and ambitions for her future that are no different to what others have expressed and she spoke a lot about how different she feels having had some counselling around her issues. It is striking that those who have accessed counselling have spoken about its value in helping them get a sense of themselves.

- 11/03/2014 Sent letters for 4 follow up sessions. Will follow these up with phone calls next week.
- 14/03/2014 Called T to try and arrange a follow-up but she said she has just started work so is really busy and unsure of her schedule at the moment. It was a bit deflating. I really want to get a date in the diary with her. I checked a few times that she wants to continue and she said she does. Ensuring this is done collaboratively means working to the participants schedule not just mine.
- 20/03/2014 Planned interview did not take place today. I will struggle to fit any in next week too which felt disappointing. However, I managed to speak to JB yesterday and she is keen to do a follow up which we arranged for next week. I'm really happy about her



continued participation because she is the only person who had few expectations of desistance, yet was very insightful and reflective.

03/07/2014

Since my last entry I have been away for month. I decided that on returning from leave on 10/05 I would not go to Holloway until August and would concentrate on analysing some interviews. There were a couple of reasons for this. It is a key aspect of grounded theory that you analyse the research as you go along. That the analysis and gathering of the data are not two completely separate tasks and that each informs the other. This makes sense to me in terms of developing theory from the research. I told Holloway I would have my first report to them by the end of July. I thought I would have more or less a clear run at this work-wise but I have been covering sick leave and annual leave and have had lots of marking which has meant I haven't been able to focus on it as much as I wanted. I am at the coding stage at the moment.

Getting follow up interviews is proving really difficult. I sent out a batch of letters last week to women I know are out and did some follow up phone calls, most of which received no response though I did learn that Misha is back in Holloway. I have done 3 follow ups since my last entry; Amy today, Zoe last week and Janine just before I went away in April. They have all had struggles but are doing 'OK.' That is, not everything is OK but overall they are managing. I've noticed that all are quite isolated and struggling with using their time. Some practicalities have been very problematic and it is different for each. For Janine it is housing – at the follow up she was living in a bedsit with a friend and her friends' son, sleeping on the sofa. Again, the resilience of these women to cope with extremely stressful situations and stay motivated is impressive. With Zoe it was being about to seek employment. She perceives a licence condition to be a hindrance to this. With Amy it is access to mental health support. There is something about obstacles stopping them from being able to put their plans for change into action. Seeing the conditions in which they are living and how grateful they are for what they have is pretty humbling. It feels different to seeing 'offenders' homes when I was a PO. Maybe not having that responsibility for their housing; that acceptance that any accommodation was a good thing means I see them in more humanistic terms in this project. Well, I always did but was conscious that as a PO, I found those practical issues were so difficult to work on so as so much of what needed to be done was out of my control - maybe didn't give them as much attention as a should have. Anyway, reflecting on the project; I feel I am making good progress on it in terms of the PhD. Things are going probably as well as can be expected. I anticipated the follow ups would be difficult to get, and they are, but if I keep persevering with them, hopefully I

will have enough to make the research compelling. I don't feel it is going so well when I think of the obligations to Holloway as, as I said before, I feel they want something asap that tells them how to 'do' desistance and I'm not sure I will be giving them that. I am also thinking of extending the project to speak to the participants Pos and some other organisations that work with women from Holloway on release such as PECAN. But I will pursue this once this first report is completed.

05/07/2014 Completed follow up with Lynne. Things have been really difficult for her since release – but not in practical sense. She spoke really openly about experiencing depression when she was released because she could not identify how she fitted into the world. Last time she was out she was an out of control alcoholic. She has spent around 14 months in prison and is trying to live differently but without the focus of the alcohol, has struggled to understand who she is and how she fits in. She identified that a peer support group would be helpful for her and she mentioned that she had thought about setting one up herself – but didn't feel she had the skills. This caused me to question my role in this. She had access to space and the will to do something and I know if I worked with her we could probably set something up and then I could remove myself from it. Part of me really wants some practical things like this to come from this research but I know at the moment I don't have the time. Staying abstinent from alcohol for her is proofing achievable. She has been sober since release and seems to have been strict about staying away from people who drink. She has partner who is also an alcoholic who is also abstinent at the moment and them going through this together is clearly helpful to her. The other key motivators are her 3 daughters and grandchild who she has contact with again after some time of being estranged. She has a lot to lose now if she messes up this time so it will be interesting to see how she gets on. She spoke very highly of probation and it seems her Officer has really been willing to offer both practical and personal support to Lynne. It feels from the few follow-ups so far that if Probation get this right, it can make such a difference – and it is just about listening really. Being prepared to hear what the women have to say about what they need. She's not complacent though. She said at the end of the session that she knows she is only one drink away from it all collapsing – the pressure of that must be so hard to bear at times.

16/07/2014 Met with Jacki today. It was really helpful to talk about the project in some depth. We had some interesting discussion about transition. That these women are transitioning from one lifestyle to another via prison. Prison is the vehicle for change – but it is not grounded in reality. So they make changes in prison but then the challenge of sustaining these on release is huge. Contributes to the argument that prison is not at all

useful for women despite the fact they speak of their experiences there quite positively. We also discussed whether there might be parallels with leaving other institutions - though I would want a gender perspective on this. There are lots of services - but almost too many - and they are not coordinated. And they mainly offer practical help so the real challenge of resettling - the emotional aspect of it, the challenge of creating a role for yourself or going back to situations that contributed to the offending in the first place, is not addressed. But even the services are not working as they should. They feel too hard to access, take too long. If we want women to maintain changes made in prison, the process for continuing with work started in prison needs to be made as simple as possible - as simple as it is in prison.

I have been coding the first set of interviews and am keeping individual memos on these so am not using this diary to reflect on those, but that is ongoing and linked to some of the observations discussed with Jacki today.

29/08/2014 I completed the interim report for Holloway today. I was quite disappointed with it. I wanted it to be more theoretical than it is. I feel like it is not very 'academic.' It was about 10,000 words but I felt like I was only giving the briefest of overviews of my analysis. I felt like I had left so much out. I reluctantly sent it to Jacki because I have to be able to hear feedback on this. It is such a huge project, and to start getting my ideas straight I need to hear the judgements of others.

Over this month I have completed another 10 interviews. In a way, the interviews are repeating the types of stories I have been hearing throughout this year. They are similar plots with different details in the characters and storylines. I still feel I made the right decision about doing so many interviews because I am still concerned about being able to catch up with enough women for this project to be successful.

29/09/2014 I had an experience of an interview not working out today and have been reflecting on how much of this was my fault. I feel really responsible. I heard that NB was upset talking about her ex-partner but didn't register how difficult this was for her. She asked to end the interview and when the recorder was off said that it made her really angry that he still had such an impact on her. That she couldn't pick up an iron without thinking about him and remembering what he did to her. Because abuse experiences have been so prevalent in this research I really wanted to hear what she had to say about it without hearing that she did not want to talk about. The upshot of this was that she ended the interview. I tried to not leave her on a low note but found it really hard. I could tell she just wanted to leave but I wanted to tell her that things would be better, that she was being strong. But she couldn't hear this and by trying to tell her I just made

her more uncomfortable. I think because I am getting to the end of the initial sessions my agenda took over a little. I think I have been quite good at not allowing that so far. I only have another couple of initial sessions to do but it has taught me to remember how difficult it is for the women to share what they are sharing with me.

07/10/2014 Completed my first 12 month follow up today. It felt really significant. A real achievement. When I started I felt like I would be lucky to hold on to one person for the full twelve months so I felt proud that I had managed to pull it off. It also made me feel very daunted by how much I still have to do. When I think of it in terms of time I think that I *only* have another year of data collection. But when I think about what that actually means, it feels completely unmanageable. Especially with the demands of my work being what they are too.

Anyway, the interview was really positive. When I last saw Catherine she was not coping well. Things were very difficult for her both practically and emotionally. Now, she is better. Interestingly in terms of the desistance research, her husband has moved out and she feels this has helped her. She no longer has to deal with the weight of his expectations and feels more able to be herself. It's not perfect. The relationship is not over and she does not want it to end completely, so it's complicated but she seems more optimistic. Interestingly she is offending (claiming to be working less than she is) because otherwise she could not afford to work. It really struck home how the system is set up almost to make people like her fail. It makes me so angry. Everything has been a struggle for her basically over the past 12 months and this is someone who on paper went out to a very secure set up.

20/10/2014 Just booked in another follow up. I also did another on 11/10. There are real patterns in the women's stories about the first few months of their release. Isolation, frustration, loneliness, wanting to do the right thing but coming up against obstacle after obstacle. Jane was released to a hostel that she did not want to go to in an area she is unfamiliar with. Because it is not her home area, her proper mental health treatment couldn't start. She spent 5 months there and settled so asked to be housed there – but as refused. So after 5 months had to start again in another new area (she was never returning to where she was from). So everything that needs to happen to help her stay out of prison has been on pause for 6 months. That is a long time when you are dealing with things Jane is dealing with. The day I saw her was the day after she had moved into her flat. She seemed pleased with it and felt like things were about to start getting easier. But much of Jane's difficulties are with her ability to cope with her offence and what happened to

trigger it and she is understandably concerned about beginning to explore these things when it could have been done in the safety of prison.

The new follow up is with someone who from a conversation on the phone sounds to have made a good start but is homeless. She wants to show me where she lives and her 'life' as she put it. She kept saying I would be safe, which made me feel a little unsafe but I know what precautions to take and I want her to be able to show me what she needs to. I want to enter into their lives and not respond to their 'criminal' label. But as I wrote that I thought 'I'll leave my ipad at home' which shows how difficult it is even for someone who has a good knowledge of women offenders to treat them as women first.

01/12/2014

My appt above did not happen. I called her the night before to check she was still happy to meet but there was no response. I also texted. As it was in Luton I could not risk going there and for the interview not to happen. I then sent another text on the day explaining and saying I would still be keen to see her but have not heard from her.

Meeting up with those still in the community is proving really challenging. Most of the phone numbers I have taken don't work. When we do make arrangements, it is hard to get them to stick to them. They work when the interviews are at their homes and seemingly when things are going OK. Those that are unstable out in the community I am finding impossible to meet with. This is entirely predictable, but unfortunate for the project as it would be good to be able to speak to the women when they are going through the process of either trying to sustain changes in the face of adversity or when they are facing obstacles that are proving too much for them.

This week I did manage to speak to SL who is back in Holloway and sentenced to 24 months for burglary. She had some interesting ideas on how resettlement could be made more useful and also on why things didn't go according to plan for her. She spoke a lot about how overwhelming it is to go out when you have been inside – as all the women who I have caught up with have said. She mentioned how it should be policy that everyone has ROTLs pre-release – so there is a gradual reintegration. It was interesting that she highlighted how she had left her house but when she returned it was not her's, it was her partner's. That he had a whole routine and life that no longer involved her. She also spoke of how, although the relationship is important to her and something she wants to sustain, she realises now that it would probably be helpful if she did not go out to what on paper is the perfect situation (i.e. husband and house). This is in such contrast to the desistance research. Relationships on release have been problematic for those who went out to them. There possibly needs to be some way for the women to really think about whether their relationships are helpful or not pre-

release. The problem is that so many of them have no choice but to return to them. It comes back to self-esteem and confidence – the ability to say to someone who has been in their lives for a number of years that they need space. And the confidence to actually be alone.

SL had asked for the transcripts of her session and I gave it to her. She was so happy to have it. She was really interested in how she had spoken and what she had said. I realised I should have offered this to all the women involved as it would probably be helpful to them. I will do this from now on.

Tomorrow I have my 2<sup>nd</sup> final session with TM. I know things are going well for her so it will be good to hear her thoughts on why this is.

02/12/2014 I got an insight today into the chaotic nature of the lives of the women in the project – even though TM is one of the most stable. I had put the wrong date in my diary so when I arrived TM was outside her house knocking on the door. She was locked out. She had stayed at her friends' last night and had lost her key. Her step-dad was in the house but would not open the door. She rang the bell and called the phone literally incessantly for 30 minutes. He came down stairs twice but would not let her in. She called her mum but she was at work. Eventually we travelled for about 45 mins to her friend's house and did the session there. TM told me she was hungover. I could smell alcohol on her and she had clearly not had much sleep. Whilst waiting and travelling to her friends' we spoke a lot about her situation now. She said in a way she was pleased I came on the wrong day so I could see the realities of her life. She explained her relationship with her step-father is problematic despite the fact he has been in her life since she was 3 years old. She said his actions this morning were punishing her because someone knocked him up at 7am wanting to speak to TM. It was clear that both were in the wrong in this situation and what TM said was that the actual problem is that she needs to move out. She's 24, has her own life, but is having to live with her parents. She described her relationship with her mum in really positive terms but feels her step –dad is being overly strict with her. TM is driven to succeed in life. On tape she doesn't say much about her uni course but on the way there she spoke of how her experience of prison makes her determined to succeed – it is what motivates her to graduate. So that she can gain her independence and make something of her life. She only has one year left. We spoke a little about the victim of her offence too – her ex. She said that he had been violent towards her numerous times and that when she bit him she was trying to protect herself. She said she knows now that she is not ready for a relationship. She said she needs to spend more time on herself before she can commit to a relationship. TM

was very sure that prison and 'the system' cannot help people; that it has to come from the individual. She is very has a strong belief in her control over her destiny which contrasts with her belief that ending up in prison could ultimately happen to anyone – or appears to contrast with it. Maybe it is actually her recognition that despite the fact that her offence was self-defense etc, she feels responsibility for what happened – or for letting things get to that stage with her ex.

09/12/2014 Visited the DTC at HMP Send today. This was officially for a book chapter I am writing on women, prison and mental health. However the experience will be of great value I think to my PhD too. I know the 'theory' around DTCs. The reason I approached Victoria Gavin (Head of DTC) to visit is because I had heard her speak at a conference about the community and was struck by the potential value of the approach. So I don't forget the 'information' about the community: it opened in 2003 and is the only DTC in the women's estate. The women in the community have a PD diagnosis. The community follows the theoretical model that informs all TCs in the prison estate though the psychologists there highlighted a difference in how it works with women. There was something a little intangible about why exactly this was. I attended the community meeting first 9:45-10am. This involved a wind-down (like open circle). It was chaired by a community member. Each of the women said how they were feeling. Most making reference to events over the weekend. The other community members and staff asked questions to elicit 'feelings' from the speaker. They also offered observations that supported the woman (Jo always comes and chats with us. Chloe talks in group) or challenged them. The challenging was done in a very safe and non-judgemental way. It felt like a mirror was being held up to the person. Sometimes the woman would keep trying to look away but was followed by the mirror. So it was really challenging. They were held to account for their behaviour and challenged to really think about what the behaviour was expressing. Yet at the same time it felt like it was done with kindness. The women all responded well to this. Some, it was clear, really took on board observations (eg: Denise – depression is about feeling anger but not trusting herself to express it because when she gets angry, people get hurt – value of psycho drama). Others struggled more to accept the challenges (Ali – hiding from Lizzie – behaving in a way in regard to her relationship with Lizzie that she had outside ie not facing difficult emotional interactions.) The TC is based on a relational model – community is encouraged to be together. Problem behaviours related to ruptured attachments and problems in managing relationships. So relationship is the vehicle for change. Skills training (eg: DBT/CBT) is needed because to access trauma it is better if the person has

some skills with which to cope but the skills are not the thing that bring about change. It follows a general TC model but sense that it functions differently for women. There was some dissent in the meeting too. Rochelle thought Vicky was putting on a bit of a show for me – or voiced this perception. This was not given too much time nor dismissed but, as everything that is done or said by the women on the TC, was considered in terms of what it reveals about where she is at the moment. It was linked to her acknowledgement of her irritability – something she is working on.

From 11-12pm there was the case management meeting. This involved the staff sharing thoughts and information on two women. It is a multi-disciplinary meeting which was attended by healthcare nurses, Probation and the TC staff. The case formulation was presented which Vicky said is important to her as she wants all staff in the community to have a good understanding of all the women on the unit. The formulation was written as a letter to the woman. It does not retreat from using clinical professional terms and concepts, but explains them in ways the woman can understand. Whilst it acknowledges risk and the seriousness of the crimes, it also highlights the women's strengths. It seeks in their background not just for things that went wrong, but what was positive and can be used therapeutically to challenge beliefs. D's mother tattooed her arm so she could not go swimming – something she was good at. She also once pulled her out of school saying her dad had died. He hadn't, she just wanted her home to sell drugs. A teacher bandaged her arms to cover the tattoos so she could go swimming. So this teacher proved to D that not all adults would use her for their own ends. It allowed her to question her belief that everyone would just use her and this is how she had to behave with others. The meeting showed real attention to risk. They look carefully for offence-parallel behaviour eg: siding with dominant women rather than those who are more vulnerable. They linked the offending behaviour to the trauma the woman has suffered eg: D behaved towards her victim in similar ways to how her father had behaved towards her and her mother. Risk is considered very carefully in these terms – engagement in groups etc is not enough. All behaviour is considered in relation to the offence. Eg: D's substance abuse brought her closer to her mother and functioned as a coping mechanism. There was careful consideration of how to use interactions that occurred organically as learning. The women were discussed in an extremely non-judgemental way. The discussion was open and honest and did not minimise or ignore issues with the women's behaviour but was always respectful of them.

A word I heard a lot in terms of how the TC tried to work with the women was compassion. Their behaviours are assessed and interpreted from a place of



compassion. Vicky explained her dislike of the label PD and that she prefers to see the behaviours as resulting from trauma and ruptured attachments. So the approach is always considering how the behaviour is related to trauma and attachments. PD somehow places blame with the individual when their behaviours are the result of what has happened to them rather than poor thinking skills, 'bad' behaviour. Despite this, the women are not left in the victim role. The approach felt empowering. There are high expectations of the women, they are held to account and expected to take responsibility for their therapy. So the approach sees their behaviour in terms of their trauma experiences but takes forward looking approach from this – how to understand and stop the damaging behaviours that have resulted from the trauma. Attachment theory also provides insights – they have a desperate need for attachment which leaves them vulnerable to unhealthy relationships. .

The approach – or a version of the approach – felt like it could be applied throughout the female estate. Some work is being done towards this with the PIPEs and Enabling Environments pilots. There are obvious obstacles such as resourcing/staffing – but there are also ways around this. It was clear that to some extent the women can run the community themselves. Could use the approach of a TC without such intensive therapy – which is what PIPEs are.

It was inspiring to see the TC in action and the commitment from both the women and the staff to its goals and aims.

04/03/2015 Had final session with AR today. She is a bright woman and made some wise suggestions for how the system could better support desistance. She had particularly interesting ideas about prison's role in this. I have noticed that I have been thinking a lot recently that prison achieves what it can in relation to rehabilitation in many ways and the real issues are around transition to and services in the community. However, some of A's comments reminded me how limited the current penal approach is. She mentioned fully working prisons in Scandanavia that work as miniature communities to teach responsibility whilst supporting the women in developing life skills. This does start in prison. She also criticised my interim report. Not negatively but questioned why it didn't include more comment from those women who did not fit the stereotype of drug user/mental health issues/ abused etc. It led to an interesting discussion. We identified that 'women like her' were managing to desist and could navigate all the obstacles once they were released. It was women with the stereotypical pathways to offending who found this more difficult. But her point was an important one as I don't want to parrot stereotypical depictions of women in this study. I want it to show their individualism and

their strengths. The challenge, as I explained to A, is that I also want to show the extent and complexity of the problems women face that lead them to offend. It was the most useful of our sessions though as she is challenging to interview. Her attitudes are difficult to listen to and she doesn't pick up on social cues but I could see that she also valued the session. She thanked me afterwards. I think it helps her self-esteem to have the involvement she does in this.

21/04/2015 A long overdue admin day which has helped me feel re-engaged with the project. I sent out a batch of 20 letters re: follow up sessions so hopefully a few of those will respond. I have also emailed Holloway to find out if any of the women are back there.

29/04/2015 Yesterday I did 2 final sessions in Holloway. NG and JB were back inside. NG for breach of licence due to not reporting, JB for another offence. During the course of the conversation with JB she told me she had been sentenced to 10 years and she believes she has to do the full sentence. When she said it I almost burst into tears. I literally felt like someone had knocked the wind out of me. It seemed incomprehensible that someone like her could end up on a 10 year sentence. I get on with her. She's a good person deep down. The tragedy of it – well the whole thing is a tragedy really – but the real tragedy of it is that it was all so avoidable. She was released homeless, had previously made herself intentionally homeless because she got into rent arrears and to get rid of them she had to relinquish her tenancy. So the council refused her any help. She had to use a friend of her brother's back account to have her benefits paid into. She was sofa surfing, squatting, sleeping on stairwells staying occasionally at Mark's (the victim's) house. She was completely dependent on people with whom she had only the most tenuous of relationships. When Mark did not get her money out when she wanted, she turned on him and cut him with a knife. She was arrested and bailed and was out for a further 6 months during which time she continued to associate with Mark. She was charged and remanded but Mark had told her he intended to drop the charges so she was completely unprepared for the sentence that was imposed. JB is tough – mentally and physically – but it was clear from her presentation that she was in shock about the sentence. She has always been quite despondent about her prospects of leading a crime free life but she feels that even if she is released after 10 years, she will face the same difficulty. All for want of a roof over her head....

05/05/2015 The 2 sessions today reflected what has been said about the challenges of remaining in the community particularly around staying away from drugs. MJ found herself mixing with the same people she took drugs with, back on crack, then heroin then dealing. She

is now serving 2.5 years for dealing to undercover police. DL is awaiting sentencing on a theft matter. A man she met in a bar offered her £10 for sex, she took the money but did not give him sex so her reported she had stolen the money. She has been in since Feb. She admitted her drinking was not under control. Her accommodation situation was unstable and she ended up in a hostel with a lot of drinkers. Both talked about not having enough to do with their time. MJ does craft and textiles work in prison and feels if she could do something like that on the outside, she would have a better chance. DL feels that she is being told by others what she needs and no-one is listening to what she says she needs. These aren't new issues and reflect what others have said but it's exciting that the women are raising these issues spontaneously.

01/10/2015 I spoke to Rebecca today from CCJS. I had emailed her following a roundtable discussion on campaigning to reduce women's imprisonment the CCJS run called Justice Matters for Women. There was discussion at this event about the power of stories and it resonated with how I feel about ways we can actually influence policy – which is what would make this research really meaningful. So there was discussion on how you can change public opinion by providing alternative narratives about who the women are who end up in prison. The women I have interviewed have spoken about how they want their stories to be told and heard but they don't have the power to make this happen. And I have 59 very detailed stories recorded from the initial sessions. So I contacted Rebecca with these vague thoughts and she was really excited about the idea and we spoke today. She had a fantastic idea of using a project they had going at CCJS called My Voice. They can apply for funding for these sorts of projects and we discussed how we could use the research to reach a public beyond academia. She had a fantastic idea of working with actors to read the scripts and possibly use something like animation to bring the women's stories to life. It is exactly the sort of thing I hoped this project would lead to. A way to draw attention to the real experiences of women in the CJS because I firmly believe few people can hear their stories and hold on to any belief that prison is an appropriate response. So I am going to do some blog posts for the website between now and December. At the same, Rebecca is going to put together a project outline. We will then work together on a funding bid – using the blog posts as an example of the stories we want to tell. I have said repeatedly that my main concern for this project was that it was meaningful. That it somehow contributed to improving things for women in custody and this really feels like something that would have impact. I was conscious when I stopped working in probation that my whole reason d'être, the way I justified my life almost, was caught up in the fact that I tried to support

people who had fewer opportunities than me. Coming into academia, I have tried to convince myself that I am still doing something worthwhile – but the worth of teaching higher education pales in comparison to the worth of working in Probation.

Dec 2015

I guess this is a time to reflect on the year. It has felt much more challenging than the first year of this project. Less has gone my way – particularly in relation to the follow-up sessions. I wanted to be able to get many more than I have succeeded in doing. There have been several reasons for this. Work commitments meant the role I established for myself at Holloway was difficult to sustain. One person trying to keep track of 59 women was too big a task. That said, I am aware of times when I could have done more. As I write that, I'm not sure what more I could have done. Maybe chased up other agencies. I made contact with several but possibly gave up too quickly. I could have included some procedure through which I was notified when women in the project were leaving in the research design. That is key learning for future. I have been very focused on the content of the sessions and on establishing a relationship with the women for the period of time I was with them and possibly didn't pay enough attention to the process of undertaking the research – which reflects my approach to work more generally! That said, I know I end this year in a great position. I had my major review last month which was positive. I was challenged on why I was including practitioners in the study and have been reflecting on this since.

I have published three blog posts with the CCJS. The response has been great to those. They have been shared quite widely and the response from people outside the CJS has been interesting in that people have been shocked about the stories. I am so familiar with them now that they don't shock me and I think people working in the field can forget how shocking the stories are.

Jan 2016

Over Xmas I thought about what I want from this project. It was always meant to be about the women, hearing their voices and ideas. For this reason, I have decided not to continue with the practitioner sessions. I feel like I would be forcing them into the project, there is no natural place for them given the project's aims. Also, it suggests that the women's ideas have no value if they are not corroborated by 'professionals.' It risks undermining the experiences of the women. This feels really important and is the crux of why I made this decision

01/04/2016

The tough teaching term is over. I have a lot of teaching to prep for next year but I am determined to create space for this project over the coming months. I have just been through exactly what I have on NVivo and what needs transcribing. So all the initial sessions I have had transcribed are now on NVivo. I have just submitted the last three

initial sessions for transcription and will then get the follow ups done. There are 19 initial sessions that I have not been able to have transcribed because of the quality of the recording or the accent of the speaker so I will attempt to transcribe these.

27/06/2016 The project with CCJS was stalled somewhat by the ethics committee who decided that my original consent did not cover the animation project. I sent opt-out letters to all the participants I had addresses for on 15/06. I have heard from 3 women so far: FJ, SB and SD who are all interested in being involved in the project. They were all really enthusiastic about it and see it as a great opportunity.

01/09/2017 The tough teaching term and the 'lot of teaching prep' referred to above ended up being more than I could have imagined. I've developed three new units in the past twelve months and had endless marking. So despite my naïve determination to create space for this project, I have had no space for it for the past year. I managed to write a draft chapter during August last year but otherwise nothing. I did make some important connections with the One Small Thing project and reignited some connections with the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies..

However, for the past week Moodle has been down so I have been able to focus on this project and re-engage with it. Most of the coding is done but a few interviews were still outstanding. The coding has felt like both a treat and a trial. It's so great to be going back through the interviews and read again the strength, hope and determination in the women's narratives. It slightly surprised me that going back through all the sessions, I can visualise all the women so clearly – and remember small details from my sessions with them like they happened last week. I have been aware of the impact these sessions had on me. I know I have been quite literally blown away by the women and what they had to say. But this clarity in my memory has reinforced this. Today though, I was triggered to return to this reflective chronology because of the sadness of their lives.

The levels of trauma they have suffered are astonishing. I don't know how you do these stories justice. Not through writing a PhD, that's for sure. I have been very involved in feminist political activism over the past two years but the closer I get to my PhD again, the further I am drifting from that as it feels so vague and distant from the realities of the women's lives. I know it's not. I know change only really happens through politics. And it was this research that pushed me into politics in the first place. So it's kind of weird for it now to be pulling me away from it. Anyway, this has made me think about what I have said earlier about not having been near this project in a year. I guess that's not true. I haven't worked on it in a year but the issues it raises for me govern my life; who I associate with, how I spend my free time, my teaching, my wider professional

network etc. I am completely embedded now, more than I was a year ago, in fighting for women's rights and I know it's these women I am fighting for; the ones who don't have their own platform.

04/10/2017 I'm into my second week of working pretty much solely on my PhD. It's been a treat. So feeling positive.

I have been studying shame, vulnerability and resilience. There is not much around in relation to people in the CJS on this – which is no bad thing for me. It is galvanising to know you are dipping a toe into ponds that not many others have noticed. Much of the literature is 'self-help' type stuff. Which is OK I think. It's making me think more about the end result of this project. Initially, I envisaged it as an exploratory project with some broad recommendations for practice. But this work has made me think more about what shape these recommendations for practice might take. I am also potentially going to be involved in some evaluation of trauma-informed work so am thinking about how shame resilience fits with trauma-informed practice. So the recommendations for practice might end up being linked to trauma-informed work. That this is how to support desistance in women. Is it?

# Appendix C: Codebooks

## Appendix C(i): Initial coding

### Nodes\\Initial coding\\Phase 1 – Initial coding

First cycle codes generated from analysis of the first and second phases of initial interviews.

Name	Description	Files	References
Ageing	Refs to ageing, being too old for prison, young enough to make a new life etc	9	12
Anticipated desistance	Responses to how the participants envisage desistance after prison	44	326
Being and being seen as normal	Comments related to wanting a normal life	4	7
Can't succeed without help	Needing help and support to achieve their goals	16	29
Confidence about not reoffending	Comments relating to determinism, responsibility, strength, agency	10	12
Hopes and Dreams	References to what they want from life	19	40
Managing relationships	Comments on relationship difficulties and their links to offending	19	30
Stability	Comments related to achieving stability (i.e: routine, abstinence, housing, employment).	14	23
Children	References to the significance of motherhood and relationships with children.	30	208

Name	Description	Files	References
Challenges of childcare	References to challenges in their experiences of mothering including comments linking offending directly to childcare responsibilities	12	39
Prison and motherhood	Comments on the experience of mothering from prison	11	42
Significance of motherhood	Comments on the general importance of motherhood to sustaining change	19	48
Coping	References to coping	31	176
Criminal Justice Agencies	References to experiences of involvement with criminal justice agencies	16	45
Drugs	References to drug use, triggers, experiences of abstinence, drug treatment	28	238
Drug treatment experiences	Comments about rehab &/or other drug treatment	16	35
Experiences of abstinence and relapse	References to periods of abstinence and triggers to relapse	14	26
Triggers to alcohol use and drug use	Stories of how the women came to use alcohol/drugs	20	41
Employment	References to employment (including general statements such as needing a job)	31	65
Meaning of employment	Comments on what having employment means to sustaining change	6	9
Experiences of prison	Reflections on experiences of custody	40	176
Attitudes to prison	Comments on the women's approaches to their sentence	12	28
Negative experiences	Comments about negative experiences of imprisonment	11	40
Positive experiences	Comments on the benefits of prison	20	43



Name	Description	Files	References
Significance of prison experiences	Reflections on how prison experiences impact on their lives outside	6	8
Fear	References to feeling frightened, scared, anxious	15	27
Health issues	References to physical and mental health issues	27	94
Housing	References to housing issues	21	61
Isolation	References to feeling alone/ different/ not belonging	26	57
Offending information	Details about their offences/offending	44	144
Poverty	References to experiencing poverty	6	14
Probation	References to experiences of probation	10	18
Relationships	Refs to relationships with intimate partners, parents, friends	44	408
Experiences of intimate relationships	Comments about intimate relationships including experiences of domestic abuse	42	220
Experiences of parental and other family relationships	Comments on relationships with parents, carers, grandparents, siblings etc, including experiences of childhood abuse and trauma	32	125
Experiences of peer relationships	Experiences of relationships with friends	19	47
Self-awareness	Reflections on self-knowledge, who they are, identity.	18	46
Sense of being in a better position than others	References to feeling better off than others	3	3
Sex work/prostitution	References to prostitution/sex work	9	27

Name	Description	Files	References
Support	References to personal and professional sources of support	40	151
Personal external support	Comments on personal support networks outside prison	17	39
Professional external support	Comments on professional support networks outside prison.	32	89
Trauma	Refs to trauma that is not childhood or domestic abuse	36	221
Turning points	Clear identifications of life changes	10	21
Violence	References to violence as perpetrator and victim	11	31

## Appendix C (ii): Focused coding

### Nodes\\Thematic codes\\Phase 2 - Focused coding

Second cycle codes generated from initial and follow-up interviews.

Name	Description	Files	References
Establishing an identity-sense of self	References to establishing an identity and sense of self. References to desiring normality, feeling ostracised/isolated, feeling shame and regret. Coding of feminist/desistance/trauma ideas on identity and the self. Separate coding of FU sessions.	37	228
Desiring normality	Presenting positives about the self, desiring/seeking conventionality, feeling unworthy of connection, feeling confused about distinction between behaviour and the self, feeling judged, sense of unreality about life experiences.	23	60
Feeling ostracized	Includes references to feeling isolated and excluded	27	61
Feeling shame and regret	References to needing to hide, self-blame, not belonging, false resilience, never feeling comfortable, self-harming, and silencing themselves.	34	111
Femism and identity construction	Coding from the literature on feminist perspectives on identity construction	2	8
Identity and desistance lit	Themes related to identity coded from desistance literature	12	82
Identity and trauma	Coding from trauma literature on identity/sense of self	7	75

Name	Description	Files	References
Identity FU	Themes related to identity from follow up sessions including refs to vulnerability, shame, stigma, isolation, and constructing an identity	19	89
Exercising agency and control	References to exercising agency and taking control, accepting responsibility and self-blame, being strong, believing in ability to change, challenges to exercising personal responsibility, feelings of self-efficacy, and internal/external locus of control. Also concepts of autonomy and responsibility in feminist/trauma/desistance lit.	62	783
Accepting responsibility and Self-blame	Includes references to taking personal responsibility for behaviour and examples of self-blame	21	40
Being strong	References to strength, determination, perseverance in efforts to desist	11	16
Believing in ability to change	Comments conveying a belief in their ability to change	17	28
Challenges to exercising agency and responsibility	Obstacles to exercising agency and personal responsibility	20	38
Feelings of self-efficacy	Comments about improved capacity to direct their lives or examples of a lack of self-efficacy	17	24
Internal and External locus of control	Comments that reveal an internal or external locus of control	20	32
Responsibility lit coding	Coding from research and literature on the theme of responsibility. Responsibility refers to notions of agency, autonomy, blame, and responsibility. Includes coding from 'agency and control' from phase two coding.	62	385
Trauma and responsibility	Coding of trauma lit of themes related to responsibility	4	36

Name	Description	Files	References
Managing relationships	References to relationships with intimate partners, peers, family, and children. 'Being saved,' 'triggering pathways to crime,' 'damaged attachments,' 'feeling vulnerable and exploited,' 'seeking safety,' and 'withdrawing. Also references to vulnerability. Coding of lit on impact of trauma on relationships	84	855
Desistance and relationships	Coding from desistance literature re: relationships.	24	146
Experiences of intimate relationships	References to relationships with intimate partners. Includes references to domestic abuse.	42	220
Experiences of parental and other family relationships	References to experiences of parental relationships or those with extended family. Includes references to childhood abuse.	32	125
Experiences of peer relationships	References to relationships with peer relationships, including those formed in custody.	19	47
Feeling vulnerable	Comments relating to feelings of vulnerability to exploitation or re-victimisation in relationships.	22	47
Motherhood	References to experiences of motherhood, relationships with children, and the motherhood identity.	23	154
Trauma and relationships	Coding of trauma lit re: relationships	16	100
Recovery	References to experiences of prison, experiences of probation, professional external support, and personal support networks. Includes references to drug/alcohol treatment and therapy from initial coding.	55	294
Challenges to recovery		10	52

Name	Description	Files	References
Drug-alcohol treatment experiences	References to experiences of treatment, abstinence, relapse, and drugs/alcohol and offending.	13	35
Experiences of prison	References on positive and negative experiences of prison and the significance of the experience of imprisonment.	40	173
Experiences of probation	Comments on positive and negative experiences of probation. Experiences of probation post-release from follow-up sessions.	30	105
Personal external support	References to personal support networks that can support desistance.	22	57
Professional external support	References to non-Criminal Justice external support networks eg: therapists, voluntary organisations.	35	107
Reflections on prison post release	Reflections on prison from follow-up sessions.	6	30

## Appendix C(iii): Thematic coding

### Nodes\\Thematic codes\\Phase 3 - Thematic coding

Third cycle codes generated from initial and follow-up sessions

Name	Description	Files	References
Recovery	Merged codes on processes of recovery from interviews on themes of posttraumatic resilience, establishing physical/emotional/psychological safety, emotional processing, and reconnection.	79	465
Reconnection	Coding of trauma and desistance literature on reconnection	10	42
Remembrance and mourning	Coding of trauma and desistance literature on emotional processing and structured intervention	4	26
Safety	Coding of trauma and desistance literature on establishing safety	10	30
Trauma-informed practice	Coding of key literature on trauma-informed practice (other than Covington/Bloom and Covington's work).	8	43
Relationships	Merged coding of relationships from interviews related to themes of positive relationships, damaged attachments, vulnerability in relationships, relationships with children, and seeking safety in relationships.	94	999
Damaged attachments	Coding of literature on attachment.	33	78
Desistance and relationships	Coding of relationships in desistance literature.	24	146
Relationships as pathway to crime	Coding of literature on role of relationships in women's pathways to crime.	24	46
Trauma and relationships	Coding of theme of relationships in trauma literature	16	100

Name	Description	Files	References
Responsibility	Merged codes from interviews on themes of autonomy transcending experience, resilience and responsibility, responsibility and reflexivity, exercising choice and responsibility, determination and personal responsibility, relational autonomy, and challenged to autonomy after release.	62	392
Responsibility literature coding	Merged codes from research on the theme of responsibility in feminist, trauma, and desistance literatures.	62	385
Restoring identity	Reflections on identity. References to 'achieving normality', 'a desire for conformity.' Also coding of refs to shame and vulnerability; 'feeling isolated and excluded,' 'needing to hide,' 'self-blame,' 'not belonging,' 'false resilience', 'never feeling comfortable,' 'self-harming,' and 'silencing themselves.'	63	516
Feminism and identity construction	Coding from the literature on feminist perspectives on identity construction	4	17
Identity and desistance lit	Themes related to identity coded from desistance lit	12	82
Identity and trauma	Coding on theme of identity from trauma literature	7	75



## Appendix D: Ethics documentation

### Appendix D(i): Informed consent form



Researcher:  
Madeline Petrillo  
Senior Lecturer,  
Institute of Criminal Justice Studies  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
St George's Building,  
141 High Street.  
Portsmouth,  
PO1 2HY.  
Tel: 02392 845389  
Mobile: 07581 813323  
Email: madeline.petrillo@port.ac.uk

Dr. Jacki Tapley (Supervisor)  
Associate Head and Principle  
Lecturer,  
Institute of Criminal Justice  
Studies,  
Ravelin House,  
Ravelin Park,  
Portsmouth, PO1 2QQ.  
Tel: 02392 843983  
Email: jacki.tapley@port.ac.uk

## Informed Consent Form

**Study Title:** Discovering desistance factor for women offenders

**REC Ref No:** 12/13:24

**Name of Researcher:** Madeline Petrillo

When complete; 1 copy to be given to the participant, 1 copy for researcher's file.

	Please initial box
1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 03 June 2013 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to the point when the data are analysed without giving any reason.	
3. I understand that data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from University of Portsmouth, HMP Holloway, the National Offender Management Service or from regulatory authorities. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
4. I agree to my interview being audio recorded.	
5. I agree to Madeline Petrillo accessing prison records held on me at HMP Holloway in order to extrapolate biographical data and information on my offending history.	
6. I understand the information will be used for a report for HMP Holloway, a PhD thesis and publications arising from this. I agree to being quoted verbatim anonymously.	
7. I understand that should I disclose specific information relating to offences for which I have not been prosecuted, this information will be passed to the relevant authority.	
8. I understand that should I disclose information indicating that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, this information will be discussed with me and passed on to the relevant authority.	
9. I agree to the data I contribute being retained for future, REC approved, research.	
10. I agree to take part in this study.	

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person taking consent : \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D(ii): Participant information sheet and leaflet



**Researcher:**

Madeline Petrillo  
Senior Lecturer,  
Institute of Criminal Justice Studies  
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141 High Street.  
Portsmouth,  
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Tel: 02392 845389  
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Email: madeline.petrillo@port.ac.uk

<b>Participant Information Sheet</b>
--------------------------------------

**Study Title:** Discovering desistance factors for women

**REC Ref No:** 12/13:24

**We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide we would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear.**

**What is the purpose of the study?**

To identify what helps women to stop offending after release from custody. Resettlement programmes in prisons are being developed around the 'desistance' research but, up to now, much of this research has been undertaken with men. It is hoped this study will help women's establishments such as HMP Holloway invest money in programmes that will meet the needs of women.

**Why have I been invited?**

Because you are close to your release date. I am hoping to interview women up to around 3 months before they are released.

**Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide to join the study. We will explain the study and go through this information sheet. If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign a consent form.

**What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be interviewed by me on three occasions; once before release, once 3 months after release and once 12 months after release. Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and will be audio recorded. The interviews will be one-to-one and all information will be stored confidentially and made anonymous. No-one will have access to the information without my agreement. The interviews will explore things such as how you became involved in offending, what you think could help you stop offending and what things get in the way of you stopping after release. .

**What will I have to do?**

You will be interviewed on three occasions; once in the prison and twice after release at a place that is convenient for you. You will need to provide contact information so that we can arrange to meet after you are released. I will regularly update you about the project.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I understand that talking about your experiences may be emotionally challenging. Please be ensured that you will have access to any support you need at HMP Holloway or in the community to support you should this be necessary. I have many years of experience working with women in prison and in the community who have survived difficult experiences and will provide you with information on organisations that can support you during and after the interviews both t HMP Holloway and in the community.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

I hope that participation will be interesting and helpful for you. This is the first study of its kind in the UK. Ideas around 'desistance' are popular with criminal justice policy makers at the moment. Your participation will help ensure that programmes and resources in women's prisons are based on what helps *women* break away from crime. This study will give you a chance to say what you, as a woman, need to help you stop offending.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes.

Quotes from your interviews may be published in future papers and articles. This would always be under a false name and false names would be used for any other people referred to in the interviews.

If you join the study, it is possible that some of the data collected will be looked at by authorised persons from the University of Portsmouth, HMP Holloway and NOMS. Data may also be looked at by authorised people to check that the study is being carried out correctly. All will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and will do their best to meet this duty.

The only exception to this is if you tell me that someone is in danger. I am then required to pass this on to the relevant authorities. Any such action will be fully discussed with you before any action is taken.

I will be asking you to talk a little about your offending behaviour. This may include offences for which you have not been prosecuted. It is important to be aware that these should be discussed generally. If you give me specific information about offences which have not been prosecuted, I am obliged to pass on this information.

- All your information will be stored securely on a computer and hard drive that is separate from HMP Holloway's computer systems. All the information will be anonymized. If information is stored on portable devices (laptops etc) the devices and the data will be encrypted.
- The data will be retained for use in future, REC approved studies. REC stands for Research Ethics Committee. This is the body who check that the proposed research is ethically sound.
- Only authorised persons will have access to identifiable data. Those include Madeline Petrillo (Researcher), the researcher's supervisors, nominated persons from the National Offender Management Service and HMP Holloway and the Research Ethics Committee.

You have the right to check the accuracy of data held about you and correct any errors.

#### **What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?**

You may withdraw from the study up to the point that the information from the interviews is analysed. Should you choose to withdraw, all your information will be held until the final round of interviews, just in case you wish to rejoin the study. After this, it will be destroyed.

#### **What if there is a problem?**

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to me or my supervisor, Jacki Tapley. We will do our best to answer your questions. Contact details are on the front of this Information Sheet. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting Dr. Phil Clements, Head of Department, Institute of Criminal Justice Studies, Ravelin House, Ravelin Park, Portsmouth, PO1 2QQ. Tel: 02392 845069. Email: phil.clements@port.ac.uk

#### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

I will provide regular updates about the results of the research to you. Reports on the research will be provided to HMP Holloway. The study will be submitted as a PhD thesis. Copies of any articles or papers published from the research will be given to you should you wish to receive them. ***You will not be identified in any report/publication.***

#### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research will be sponsored by the University of Portsmouth. Neither the individual researcher, the University of Portsmouth nor HMP Holloway will benefit from this research financially.

#### **Who has reviewed the study?**

Research in the University of Portsmouth is looked at by an independent group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by University of Portsmouth Faculty of Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

#### **Further information and contact details**

##### **1. General information about research.**

##### **MADELINE PETRILLO (Researcher, University of Portsmouth)**

Tel: 02392 845389

Mobile: 07581 813323

Email: [madeline.petrillo@port.ac.uk](mailto:madeline.petrillo@port.ac.uk)

**Dr. JACKI TAPLEY (Supervisor, University of Portsmouth)**

Tel: 02392 843983

Email: [jacki.tapley@port.ac.uk](mailto:jacki.tapley@port.ac.uk)

**Mr GEORGE WOOLSEY (Head of Reducing Reoffending, HMP Holloway)**

Contact by application

**2. Specific information about this research project.**

**MADELINE PETRILLO (Researcher)**

Contact details as above.

**3. Advice as to whether I should participate.**

You can speak to whoever you feel can help you with this decision.

Dr. Tapley and I are happy to provide any information that would be helpful but are not impartial as we have an interest in your participation in the research.

**MADELINE PETRILLO (Researcher)**

**Dr. JACKI TAPLEY (Supervisor)**

Contact details as above.

**4. Support organisations:**

Within HMP Holloway, the Listeners, Chaplaincy, Personal Officers, Healthcare, Senior Management Team and Probation have all been briefed about the research projects. They cannot provide detailed information about the project, but can support you should your involvement in the research raise any concerns.

**Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information. Should you wish to be part of this study, you will receive a copy of this information sheet and a consent form. I very much look forward to working with you.**

Kind regards,

Madeline Petrillo  
Researcher

## Appendix D (iii): Favourable ethical opinion letter



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**REC reference number: 12/13:24**

**Please quote this number on all correspondence.**

11<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Dear Madeline,

**Full Title of Study:** Discovering desistance factors for women offenders.

**Documents reviewed:**

Consent Forms  
Ethics Self Assessment  
Invitation Letters  
Memo of Agreement  
Participant Information Sheets  
Protocol

Further to our recent correspondence, this proposal was reviewed by The Research Ethics Committee of The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

It has been agreed that a favourable opinion be offered by the Committee, subject to the following conditions:

1. Confirmation that this stage of the research is limited to interviewing of women prisoners in prison - further research will be subject to further review.

2. The favourable opinion does not extend to interviewing staff - we need documentation for this.
3. Minor corrections should be made to docs as indicated by the tracked changes.
4. If payments are to be made to offenders the Committee must be informed - meanwhile it might be wise to delete the relevant section from the PIS.
5. Clarification of the number of offender participants - a grounded theory study would normally only include enough to achieve data saturation. We need to be quite sure that the study can be successfully undertaken.

Kind regards,

FHSS FREC Chair

**David Carpenter**

Members participating in the review:

- David Carpenter
- Richard Hitchcock
- Jane Winstone



## Appendix D(iv): Prospective discussion topics

### **PROSPECTIVE DISCUSSION TOPICS**

Information for the REC: *The following are a list of interview prompts. They outline the potential topics that may be raised and questions illustrating how each topic might be developed. However, each interview will develop according to the issues the participants raise. The only topics that will be specifically covered in all interviews are 'Offending History' and 'Anticipated Desistance.' I expect the duration of the interviews to be 60 minutes on average, though again, this will be directed by the participant. I have gained transferable skills in managing interviews so that information is gathered in an empathic, collaborative and supportive manner from my experience as a Probation Officer and person-centred counsellor for women who have experienced domestic abuse*

#### **Offending History:**

Tell me about the first time you committed a crime.

- Tell me how you ended up in Holloway.
- I'm wondering what purpose offending serves for you?
- What stops you from 'going straight?'
- Why is stopping offending important to you?

#### **Relationships:**

Family sculpt exercise to trigger discussion around supports/risky relationships/desired changes. This will facilitate discussion on relationship history, histories of abuse, childhood experiences, attachment, notions of the self in relation to others.

- Can you tell me what worries you about release in terms of your relationships?
- What are you looking forward to?

#### **Emotional well-being:**

- On a scale of 1-5, how well would you say you cope with the things you have experienced?
- What sorts of things cause emotional distress?
- What coping mechanisms work for you?
- What would improvement feel like?
- How able do you feel to be the sort of person you want to be?

#### **Finances:**

- How easy or hard is it for you to manage financially?

#### **Drugs/Alcohol:**

- Tell me about your first experience with drugs/alcohol.
- In what way did it become a problem for you? (This is to get to their understanding of the nature of the problem)

- I'm wondering what impact it has had on you?
- How do you feel when you think about stopping/maintaining abstinence?
- What might make this difficult for you?
- Are there things/people that can help you?
- How easy/hard is it for you to avoid the things/people that might be obstacles?
- How easy/hard will it be for you to access/use the support you need?

**Heath:**

- Are you in good physical health?
- How do you feel about the state of your health?
- How do you feel about your mental health?
- How does this affect your life?

**Lifestyle:**

- On the outside, what does a typical day look like?
- When you envisage a 'happy' future, what does it look like?
- How able do you feel to achieve this?
- What do you like most about your life at the moment?
- What is getting in the way of you living how you want to live?

**Education and employment:**

- How important is getting a job to you?
- What would having a job provide for you?
- How able do you feel to gain employment after release?

**Anticipated desistance:**

- How able do you feel to live a crime-free life?
- On a scale of 1-5, how likely do you think you are to reoffend after release?
- If you reoffend, what do you envisage will have got in the way of you going straight?
- If you don't reoffend, what do you think will have helped you change?
- Do you know any ex-offenders who have stopped committing crime?

Appendix E: Typed copy of letter from 'Rina' (original available on request)

'Rina'  
HMP Bronzefield  
Woodthorpe Road  
Ashford  
Middlesex  
TW15 3JZ

Dear Madeline

Thank you for your letter. It was good to hear from you again.

As you are aware, I did not get my HDC Tag so my release date is now the end of April this year. I was really gutted when my date passed but I am used to disappointment in my life now as you know so I wasn't too optimistic on getting HDC in the first place.

As stated in my first letter I enjoyed taking part in your project so much so I would be more than happy to help again at any time.

In respect to me having a CD posted in as I would think some rules would stand here as they do at HMP Holloway, so if you wouldn't mind posting it on to my partner X, I would be most grateful. I also remember you saying you was putting everything onto paper, if this is the case, I would be more than grateful to have this sent to myself alongside the CD too. If your able to do this then it would be good as I am wanting to start my book on my life and it would be a great help for me to start from there. So again, I would be very grateful for you to post me the written copy and the CD to my home address:

[address provided]

Again, thank you for all your help throughout this project. I have enjoyed taking part. If I can help anymore you know where I am. I would be more than glad to help.

Yours  
'Rina'

